

INSPECTION REPORT

ST FRANCIS XAVIER'S COLLEGE

Liverpool

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104718

Headteacher: Brother Francis Patterson

Reporting inspector: David Morton
13154

Dates of inspection: 12 – 16 February 2001

Inspection number: 184149

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	11 to 16 – Boys 16 to 18 - Mixed
School address:	Beaconsfield Road Woolton Liverpool
Postcode:	L25 6EG
Telephone number:	0151 288 1000
Fax number:	0151 288 1001
E-mail address:	postmaster@sfx.lpool.sch.uk
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr James Burns
Date of previous inspection:	January 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
13154	David Morton	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievements How well pupils are taught How well the school is led and managed What should the school do to improve further
13762	Norman Shelley	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well the school cares for its pupils How well the school works in partnership with parents
27803	Joseph Clark	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
11966	John Clay	Team inspector	Design and technology	
11746	Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	
12362	Lilian Hindley	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
23926	Douglas Howorth	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Geography	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	English	
19452	Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	History	
23709	Ann Powell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
04193	Colin Radley	Team inspector	Classics	
31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
08329	Gillian Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Physical education	
22985	Jacqueline Sparks	Team inspector	Science	
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
20270	June Tracey	Team inspector	Mathematics	

The inspection contractor was:

North West Education Services

Cheshire House
164 Main Road
Goostrey
Cheshire
CW4 8JP

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Francis Xavier's College is a Catholic foundation comprehensive school, larger than most secondary schools, with 1274 boys on roll, of whom 202 are in the sixth form. Sixth-form numbers include 12 girls. The school was founded in 1842. The school is oversubscribed. Its population is stable, few boys joining or leaving except at the usual times. It takes pupils mainly from associated primary schools but includes a significant number from all over Liverpool and beyond. Most of the sixth form comprises boys who joined the school at the age of 11, but a number, including the small number of girls, come from other schools. The school's pupils come from a wide mix of social backgrounds; the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is about average. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is just over three per cent, in keeping with a third of metropolitan areas; the proportion of these with English as an additional language is low and none are at the early stage of language acquisition. The overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 is average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs, including those with statements, is below the national average; the proportion with statements is broadly in line with the national average. Almost four-fifths of pupils continue in education after the age of 16 and more than nine out of ten leaving the sixth form move on to higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with a number of distinctive features. The school's long tradition and the commitment of experienced members of staff have led to the fostering of a school community that strives to be true to its Catholic character. The school also responds positively to the opportunities provided by the multi-faith and secular cultures of the city of which it is a part. The headteacher provides quiet, authoritative leadership that effectively focuses on a clear vision of the school's future sense of direction and the management of necessary change to meet emerging needs. Standards are above average and pupils and sixth-form students achieve well. Teaching is good overall, although in a third of lessons could be improved. As a result, some pupils do not build sufficiently on their previous attainment as they move through the school. The sixth form is cost effective. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- It is true to its Catholic mission and traditional character; these are reflected in the positive attitudes of pupils, very good relationships and the school's caring ethos. Efforts to develop pupils spiritually, morally and culturally are good.
- It has provided outstanding facilities for its sixth form and its students achieve results that are well above average.
- There is a steady improvement in overall standards, year by year.
- The school effectively challenges high-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 11.
- Teaching is good overall.
- The provision and take-up of extra-curricular activities are very good. The quality of the Boys' Choir is exceptionally high and there is very good achievement by sports teams.

What could be improved

- Teaching in two-thirds of lessons is good or better. Improvement is needed in the remaining third of lessons that are no better than satisfactory and occasionally unsatisfactory.
- Heads of department and the full leadership team need to develop a more coherent and enthusiastic vision and purpose.
- The standards in information and communication technology [ICT] across subjects are not high enough, especially amongst classes of high-attaining pupils

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection in 1995. Pupils are achieving better results in GCSE examinations, including pupils of average and below average attainment. The proportion of teaching that is good or better is now greater and in line with the national average, although the methods used in a third of lessons still do not always take sufficient account of the learning needs of pupils.

The school has broadened its curriculum recently in Years 10 and 11, especially that for middle and lower-attaining pupils. As a result, more pupils are choosing to stay on into an increasingly comprehensive sixth form offering a wider range of courses to students.

Governors have established more appropriate and focused planning for the development and improvement of the school. The school now meets statutory requirements for art and design, English, French and physical education and is closer to meeting requirements in ICT. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is now satisfactory.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	C	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	A	

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

In 2000, overall results attained by boys in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science at the age of 14 were well above average compared with boys' performance in all and similar schools. Results were also above those in mixed schools. However, rates of improvement over the last five years have been at a slower rate than that found nationally.

In 2000, overall results attained by boys in GCSE examinations at the age of 16 were above average compared with boys' performance in all schools and well above average compared with schools in which a similar number of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Results were also above those found in mixed schools. The rate of improvement in the school's results in GCSE examinations has been broadly in line with the trend found nationally. The best examination results were in classics, English language and literature, French, geography, history and Spanish. Results in art and design, design and technology, physical education, religious education and science were relatively not as good.

In 2000, A-level results were well above average and the best results the school has achieved over the last five years. In GNVQ examinations in 2000 at intermediate and advanced levels, all pupils passed, the majority at merit or distinction level. The best examination results in subjects with substantial entries at A-level were in English literature, mathematics, chemistry, biology and Christian theology. Results in general studies, history, geography and physics were relatively less good.

Standards of work seen during the inspection overall are currently above the national average. Analysis of pupils' work shows that standards in Years 10 and 11 are average, but in all other years are above average overall. In relation to their prior attainment, the achievement of all pupils is good throughout the school, although less rapid achievement is made in Years 10 and 11. The school has set realistic targets for 2001. Pupils' literacy skills are satisfactory but the school is not doing enough to improve them. Skills of numeracy are above average and mathematical concepts are applied well across subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils like school and most value their education; this leads most to respond positively to the good range of opportunities available to them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils respond well to the Catholic character of the school and their behaviour is good in almost all instances.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good. Pupils are responsive to the character of the school and develop values and approaches to their lives that reflect their developing maturity.
Attendance	Attendance is good overall and has improved in recent years.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching and learning are good overall, consistently so in two-thirds of lessons. The proportion of good or better teaching is in line with the national average. This teaching is lively, energetic and meets the learning needs effectively of most pupils. Teaching in English is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 to 13; the teaching of mathematics is good throughout the school and that of science is good in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In other subjects, teaching is very good in business studies in the sixth form and generally good teaching occurs in classics, geography, history, modern languages and music, and less good in art and design, design and technology, information and communication technology and physical education. Teaching in all sixth-form courses makes challenging demands of students. The teaching of pupils in withdrawal groups for special educational needs is very good. Teaching was very good or excellent in 18 per cent of lessons, some of it outstanding in history and music. Teaching was good or better in 64 per cent of lessons. Teaching was satisfactory in 30 per cent and unsatisfactory in six per cent of lessons. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory and of numeracy good but some teachers do not give sufficient attention to the teaching of the skills of literacy amongst average and lower-attaining pupils. Some teachers provide too few opportunities for purposeful talking in lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides good learning opportunities although the design of the timetable prevents some pupils being grouped in classes of similar attainment for a particular subject. This means that a small minority of pupils underachieve. The school has responded to pupils' needs by introducing GNVQ foundation courses in Years 10 and 11 and the full range of intermediate and advanced vocational courses in the sixth form. The school does not meet fully the requirements for ICT in the National Curriculum. The sixth form is a strong feature of the school. Its organisation and provision as a social unit are very good and it now attracts a comprehensive range of students, including girls. The range of extra-curricular activities available to all pupils is extensive and the take-up very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. These pupils make good progress, especially when withdrawn for special programmes to develop their skills of literacy and numeracy.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There are good opportunities for spiritual and moral development and a very wide range of experiences for pupils to develop culturally in the arts and in awareness of other faiths and cultures. Provision for social development is satisfactory although there are fewer opportunities than usually found for pupils to exercise responsibility.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Child protection procedures are in place and arrangements for the health, safety and welfare of pupils are satisfactory. Tracking pupils' progress towards achieving targets is thorough and motivates many to strive for success.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Parents have a high regard for the school. The school has an effective partnership with most parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and the deputy heads promote a good sense of the school's character; they maintain a vision and purpose for the further development of the school. The headteacher communicates these to staff with a quiet, sensitive authority. The wider leadership team fulfils its specified tasks well; however, this team and the heads of department lack a shared drive and purpose for change and development in the school. The school's planning is sound but could be more firmly rooted in seeking always to improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards to even higher levels, especially in Years 10 and 11.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors show great commitment to the school and know it well. They know its strengths but are less aware of the areas where further improvements should be made.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's analysis of performance data related to individual pupils and departments is very good and beginning to have an impact on improved standards. However, at present the monitoring and support of teaching and learning are insufficiently systematic.
The strategic use of resources	Accommodation in the lower school is poor. The management of resources is good and the school budget is carefully prioritised. The school understands and applies principles of best value successfully.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>A small minority of parents indicated that they were pleased:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • The good progress their children make. • The hard work expected from their children. • The way their children are maturing and becoming more responsible. • The quality of educational visits. 	<p>A small minority of parents indicated their concern to see improvement in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results achieved by middle and lower-attaining pupils. • By streaming being replaced with setting • Behaviour in some classes. • More consistent setting of homework. • The ways in which they are informed of how their children are getting on. • Greater attempts to work closely with parents. • A wider range of extra-curricular activities.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents, although some teachers could have greater expectations of middle and lower-attaining pupils. They did not find significant evidence to suggest that streaming had a negative impact on standards achieved by boys, although did discuss ways in which pupils could be grouped so that in each subject they were grouped according to their prior attainment in that subject. They also agree that behaviour of a minority of pupils in classes with middle-attaining pupils should be better and less disruptive for others. They agree that most pupils in these classes should achieve higher standards. However, inspectors found that the frequency and amount of homework set are about right; the school makes reasonable efforts to maintain consultative contact with parents and the range of extra-curricular activities is good. However, inspectors believe that annual reports to parents do not give sufficient information about what pupils know, understand and can do.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1 Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 show that boys' achievements are well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. Results in 2000 reversed a slightly poorer set of results in 1999, returning the school to the overall levels of the preceding two years. Despite this, the rate of improvement over the last five years has been below that found nationally. Compared with similar schools in 2000 overall results were well above average and those in mathematics and science were amongst the highest five per cent of similar schools.

2 Standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' books during Years 7 to 9 are generally above average and boys' achievement in relation to their prior attainment is good. There is evidence of the gradual acquisition of new knowledge, understanding and skills that has an impact on the quality of their learning in most subjects. This is especially so when teachers set work to meet the differing learning needs of pupils. However, standards in ICT do not match this pattern as pupils have only acquired a narrow range of knowledge and skills in the subject.

3 The school improves results in English by the time pupils are 16 years of age, both language and literature being well above the national average. Results in mathematics are above the national average. However, overall results in science fall at the age of 16 and are just in line with the national average. In the last few years results in GCSE examinations overall have been above average. In 2000, boys' results were well above the national average for boys and above average compared with those found in mixed schools. Results overall were well above average compared with those mixed schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Yet, when compared with mixed schools that had similar results in the National Curriculum tests in 1998, this school's results overall were well below average. Whilst acknowledging that this comparison is comparing the performance of boys with that of boys and girls, and therefore is not comparing like-with-like, there is some underachievement in Years 10 and 11 even though there has been improvement since the previous inspection that has been at a similar rate over the last five years to that found nationally. The school's best results were in classics, English language and literature, French, geography, history and Spanish. Relatively, results in art and design, design and technology, physical education, religious education and science were weaker. The school has set realistic targets for overall improvement in 2001.

4 In Years 10 and 11 the work of boys is mostly at average levels. Analysis of pupils' work confirms this and does not fully reflect results being obtained in examinations at the end of Year 11. Achievement since the end of Year 9 is satisfactory during Years 10 and 11, except in music where achievement is very good and English, classics, geography, history and modern foreign languages where it is good. In these subjects, pupils of differing levels of attainment do well in relation to their prior attainment. They speak comfortably about their subjects, understanding many of the technical terms they are beginning to use. The quality of extra-curricular work in music has a significant impact on standards and learning in music lessons in Years 10 and 11. In English pupils begin to understand concepts such as dramatic irony and in geography and history develop investigative skills that lead to greater understanding of geographical and historical concepts. Standards and achievement in information and communication technology remain unsatisfactory during these years. This is owing to the little time devoted to ICT in Year 10, especially in the higher sets; these pupils do not have the opportunity to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum or follow a GCSE course. However, overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving better now than they were at the time of the previous inspection, including the middle and lower attainers.

5 Pupils with special educational needs attain the standards that their teachers expect of them, and some do better. Some pupils entering the school with very low literacy levels gain pass grades at GCSE. This represents a positive outcome for pupils with special educational needs. In their withdrawal groups and mainstream lessons, with appropriate support, most pupils make sound progress overall.

6 The school does not have a detailed policy for the development of literacy so that little is planned to improve on the average levels of literacy. There is nobody designated to coordinate development in this key area. Nonetheless, pupils' skills are such that many write well in a number of subjects, although

rarely in extended forms or a variety of styles. Pupils' skills in reading are sufficient for them to respond well to the written work, especially novels and poetry.

7 Standards of numeracy are above average and pupils effectively carry out operations mentally. Pupils use these skills well in a range of subjects, notably in geography and science where their graphical representations enhance their understanding of key findings.

8 Sixth-form students' results at the end of their GCE A-level and GNVQ courses are good. A-level results in 2000 were the best in the school's history and well above average. There was a 100 per cent pass rate at GNVQ, the majority at merit level and a significant minority of students attained distinction. A-level results show good added value in relation to results in the GCSE examinations two years earlier, reflecting good achievement. In those subjects with a substantial number of entries, the best results were in English literature, mathematics, chemistry, biology and Christian theology. Results in general studies, geography, history and physics were relatively less good. In GNVQ examinations, results overall were good in the advanced and intermediate courses in business studies. Success is a direct result of teaching in the sixth form that is consistently good combined with very positive attitudes displayed by students. The school has set challenging targets for 2001, especially in GNVQ courses.

9 Standards on a day-to-day basis are above average in the sixth form; this is confirmed by an analysis of students' work. Very good preparation for examinations ensures that students peak appropriately, generally enhancing the levels of performance seen at the earlier time of the inspection. Standards of speaking and listening in the sixth form show an improvement on those found in the lower age groups. Students show a growing understanding of their subjects and the key concepts that underpin them. Students are effective at debating issues and arguing a point of view. In written work, students in English and history write critically and securely; they interpret their research effectively. This is a sign of an increasing readiness to work independently and take responsibility for planning their work to positive conclusions. The members of staff with pastoral responsibility for the sixth form have developed a good work ethic amongst students across the full range of courses. Although it was not possible to see more than two lessons in key skills during the inspection, this is an area of students' improving standards of communication, the application of number and ICT that is now a central part of each student's programme. Students' skills and competence in spoken and written communication are improving; it is an area of some concern in Years 7 to 11. There is some effective use of ICT and the Internet in the sixth form, but there is scope for the enhancing of skills in a more sophisticated and planned way. The teaching of ICT in Year 12 is good and students are advancing well; it is intended that this will now continue into Year 13. Where the application of number skills is required, students on all courses appear to manage well. It was not possible during the inspection to see any work specifically in this area, however.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10 Pupils like the school and value their education; their attitudes to school are good. Their behaviour and attendance are also good and their personal development is satisfactory. This is similar to the previous inspection. Parents are satisfied with the standard of behaviour of most pupils although a few express concern about the disruptive behaviour of a minority of pupils.

11 Pupils were very keen to come to the school originally and have maintained their enthusiasm since. They particularly enjoy sporting opportunities, choice of food at lunchtime, the friendliness and support of teachers, most of the facilities at upper school and the various visits out of school. Most pupils value their learning experiences and want to achieve well. They express few common concerns although some feel, rightly, that access to computers in some subjects is limited.

12 The standard of pupils' behaviour contributes well to the quality of learning and life in the school. Behaviour in lessons is almost always good, is sometimes very good and occasionally excellent. Sometimes, however, the behaviour of small groups of boys is unsatisfactory and disrupts the learning of others in the class. Behaviour outside classrooms is less reliable but is mostly orderly. Nevertheless, the number of temporary exclusions is similar to the average for secondary schools, a small number of pupils are referred to a withdrawal room and a few are served with a Saturday-morning detention. Relationships amongst pupils are very good. Bullying is not an issue. Pupils work well together.

13 Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Pupils respond well to opportunities for responsibility but insufficient formal experiences are provided by the school. There is no school council for them to represent others and to take some communal responsibility. They show resourcefulness in raising money for charities. They have some involvement in the community, for example in supporting a hospice and as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. However, not all pupils have planned experience in community service.

14 Some teachers are so anxious to maintain control of pupils that opportunities for independent learning in their lessons are infrequent. Some pupils receive too little guidance about careers and in personal, social and health education pupils have too little time to explore moral and social issues because of time-tabling constraints.

15 In most activities pupils show appropriate respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others. Occasional instances of vandalism, misuse of toilets and the amount of litter dropped, suggest that at least some pupils have an insufficient regard for property and the effect of their actions on others.

16 Attendance rates for the whole school are above the average for secondary schools and unauthorised absence is below the average. Nevertheless, attendance of some pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in some lower-attaining classes is unsatisfactory. The appointment of a learning mentor is designed to tackle this issue. The progress and attainment of these pupils are adversely affected by the frequency of their absences. There is a small amount of internal truancy. Punctuality at the start of the school day is satisfactory. Late arrival at lessons is more significant not just due to distances between classrooms but also to a lack of urgency on the part of some pupils.

17 Most pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to their work, particularly in response to specialist teaching, extra in-class support and in withdrawal groups. The provision of appropriate lesson materials and teaching styles helps to create a secure learning environment. This in turn encourages a sustained level of concentration and commitment, with substantial gains in self-confidence, particularly evident in oral responses.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18 Teaching and learning are good. Two-thirds of lessons are imaginative, energetic and strive to challenge pupils and students to extend their learning and achieve their best. In the sixth form, students are helped to move towards a more independent approach to their learning, especially in the advanced GNVQ courses that have been introduced recently. Most students on all courses strive to be successful. There has been a significant improvement in the percentage of good or better teaching since the previous inspection. There are only occasional examples of outstanding teaching and the proportion of very good teaching, nearly one in five lessons, is below that found nationally where teaching in one in four lessons is very good. The proportion of good or better teaching, two-thirds, is in line with the national average. The best teaching is in the sixth form where four out of five lessons are good or better and almost one in four is very good or better.

19 In a small proportion of lessons, 10 out of 166 observed, teaching was unsatisfactory; however, a proportion of these lessons were taken by casual supply staff employed at short notice to cover illness. These teachers were not always fully prepared for the classes they were covering. Generally, but not always, supply teachers are given the necessary support to be effective. The level of absence in the mathematics department has had a significant impact on the continuity of learning, especially in Years 7 to 9. The school acknowledges the need to prepare teachers covering for absence as thoroughly as time allows. This situation is not good and occasionally leads to disruptive behaviour as pupils miss the security they would experience with a regular teacher. Where teaching is unsatisfactory in a minority of lessons in English, mathematics and science, it is often due to poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils whose attitudes prevent the lesson's objectives being achieved. On occasions, for example in design and technology, teachers actually teach techniques incorrectly; as a result boys learn poor habits such as using metalwork vices incorrectly to hold work or sitting down when sawing or planing. The quality of tools is not always well maintained, sharpened or correctly set.

20 In a third of lessons that are satisfactory rather than good or better, whilst pupils complete work set, they are easily distracted unless being closely supervised. Sometimes the style of presentation of

teachers, otherwise teaching satisfactorily, is based on repeated routines and lengthy introductions by the teacher that are followed by class activity that is repetitive and unimaginative. In the lessons that are not fully effective, teachers do not show enthusiasm for their subject or devise methods to gain the interest of pupils. Insufficient demands are made of pupils and the teachers' expectations are too low. The timing of activities in lessons is not well judged. In the less secure teaching there is too much input by the teacher and pupils are not encouraged to take responsibility in their learning. A narrow range of methods is used, especially with lower-attaining pupils; as a result their interest flags and their behaviour and concentration suffer. Often these pupils are subjected to too many menial tasks and exercises that lack challenge or real interest. There are too few opportunities to spend time reflecting on what has been learned and lessons are too rushed.

21 Teaching is good overall throughout the school in mathematics, classics, geography, history and modern foreign languages. Teaching is very good in music in the sixth form. With the exception of art and design, where it is satisfactory, teaching is good in every other subject in the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is satisfactory in science, art and design, design and technology, ICT and physical education; the teaching of music in Years 10 and 11 is very good and good in all other subjects. However, achievement in some subjects, for example mathematics, is no better than satisfactory, despite teaching that is sometimes good, because teachers have to spend too much time managing the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of boys, especially in middle and lower-attaining groups. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is good in all subjects except English, art and design, ICT and music where it is satisfactory and design and technology where teaching is unsatisfactory. This is because teachers do not make sufficient demands on pupils to design products appropriate to purpose and drawing skills are under-developed by teachers.

22 Teachers, almost without exception, have very good knowledge of their subject and in the best lessons use this to plan imaginative and lively lessons. For example, in a sixth form music lesson the teacher illustrated his very good knowledge of Stravinsky's 'Firebird' by skilful playing of the keyboards and prudent use of a recording to support the group's discussion of a recent concert visit the previous evening. Boys were engaged in lively discussions, comparing features of this composition with others known to them such as Holst's 'The Planets'. The students' knowledge and understanding of Stravinsky's work were extended and their analytical skills developed. In a science lesson with Year 8 about the properties of acids pupils recalled previous learning well. The teacher's good understanding of the chemistry of metal and acids was apparent in very clear explanations and led to a successful practical element that was the main focus of the lesson. Variety, energy, purpose and suitable activities were also good features of this lesson. Similar probing questions and confident knowledge of the play meant that a Year 9 class studying 'Macbeth' and the murder of Banquo were quick to learn of motives and link them to more recent political murders. Such effective teaching meant that pupils and sixth-form students were well aware that they are encouraged to participate actively in their own learning. Teachers use a range of methods and this captures the interests of willing pupils. A teacher confident in the subject approached history with Year 8 as a good story well told as he described the early life of Charles I. This was peppered with demanding questions and the pupils' interest was such that they rose to the challenge and asked questions themselves of the teacher. The class was well prepared to investigate the life of Charles I and the events leading up to the Civil War.

23 The good teaching is demanding and rigorous. In a mathematics lesson with Year 9 a quickly moving and challenging approach encourages pupils to ask questions about the conversion of metric units when applied to real situations, for example the use of water meters. This teaching led to imaginative problem-solving, drawing comparisons in the similar concept of capacity when applied to a swimming pool or the mixture in a cake tin. Where teachers show enthusiasm for their subject, boys respond well and are themselves well motivated. In a Spanish lesson with Year 11 the imaginative use of a variety of resources including video recordings, tape-recording and use of text allowed the four aspects of language to be studied to a common purpose leading to good sequencing in reading and then writing. The teacher used time well in the lesson and new learning and vocabulary occurred through the excellent choice of materials and activities. In a very good geography lesson with Year 7 appropriate and demanding homework was set to enhance a lesson about the River Nile and the importance of irrigation. The lesson was notable for its excellent class management and good relationships and pupils were able to reflect on whether the River Nile was 'a gift from God' and for what purpose. Pupils responded to the confident teaching and made connections between physical and human geography. The teacher used questions effectively, stepping them in difficulty and demanding rigorous thought from the class in a fast-

moving lesson. The homework set to reinforce this learning was for pupils to design and write a postcard about the features of the Nile valley as a result of an imaginary two-week stay. Its purpose was clearly stated and pupils looked forward positively to the task. The teaching and use of the skills of numeracy across subjects is good. However, many teachers do not use strategies available to them to develop more fully the skills of literacy amongst pupils, especially amongst boys in the lower and middle-attaining groups.

24 Teaching in the sixth form has many good features. The bridge between Year 11 and sixth form study is well established. Teachers have prepared well for the introduction of the new AS subjects and GNVQ courses. Teachers meet well the demands of syllabuses that are new to them. A significant aspect of the teaching is the insistence that students should take some responsibility for their learning. In an AVCE Business Studies lesson with Year 12 about marketing, students were able to relate their theoretical knowledge to a real situation with a speaker from a travel firm. The teacher indicated how to combine theory and practice by encouraging students to research through gaining work experience, writing for information or using the Internet. Students evaluated the strengths and drawbacks of different approaches to research. In a physics lesson with Year 13 about nuclear properties, the teacher used the throwing of a soft ball at a model of an atom to capture the attention of the students and teach the notion of nuclear scattering allocated to circular areas around the nucleus. This proved an imaginative and productive introduction to theories of atomic structure. Further work was well presented using an overhead projector and this led to practical work based on acquired learning and leading to new learning. This learning was thoughtful and confident as a result of the skilful steps taken through the lesson. In discussions with students it is clear that they value the half-termly reviews of their performance, trust their teachers' judgements and respond well to advice. The successful tradition in the school at A-level continues and is sustained by staff and students. The demands of the range of new GNVQ courses are challenging and has given a broader ethos to the school's sixth form. Teaching on these courses is invariably good or better and students value it; most work hard on their assignments and receive feedback positively. Students are challenged to achieve and improve on their previous best in all courses across the sixth form. As a result students increase their knowledge and understanding and noticeably improve their skills of independent learning.

25 Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught by the specialist teacher and in withdrawal groups. Teachers of pupils with special educational needs have very good knowledge and understanding of the pupils' needs, and tailor their teaching styles and learning materials to meet them. The consistent approach to learning and the use of praise and encouragement have a positive impact on pupils' learning and the standards pupils achieve. The variety of short time-span tasks and the use of sequenced questions contribute effectively towards sustaining a good level of motivation and challenge and affirm the level of understanding of the work in hand. The learning support assistants available are effectively deployed to maximise their input. They work closely with the class teacher, are well-informed about individual targets, objectives and standards to be expected. More assistants are needed to meet the wide range of needs, particularly in Years 9 to 11, to ensure greater continuity and consistency in learning experiences and outcomes across the curriculum.

26 Individual education plans clearly identify needs, specify targets and recommend approaches for tackling these needs. Their use as a tool in teaching of subjects varies. Where they are used effectively they have a positive impact on learning outcomes. Departmental links are now based on a more formal basis. They are used mainly as a two-way exchange of information with regard to progress made by individual pupils. The representatives meet with the coordinator of special educational needs twice a term and minutes are kept of discussions. Teaching by specially trained teachers is designed to meet pupils' needs with appropriate lesson material. Where classroom support is available, the staff is used effectively to maximise learning outcomes.

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

27 The aim of the curriculum is to allow pupils and students to reach their full academic potential through a provision that is broad and matches the needs and attainment of different groups. Pupils throughout the school are mostly taught in the same class for all subjects. This structure is not commonly found in secondary schools and is a particular feature of this school.

28 The previous inspection found that the rigid application of this arrangement, with little curricular choice, did not fully take into account the needs, interests and career prospects of all pupils. Since then a review of the curricular provision has taken place each year and as a result there has been a number of changes. Most have occurred recently, including the change to a 25 period week that provides more teaching time than that usually found, particularly when the taught tutor time is added. Consequently, the former low allocation of time in Years 7 to 9 for a number of subjects has been increased, enabling the requirements of the National Curriculum to be met. However, the time and arrangements for teaching information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7, 8 and 9 create problems for its successful application. In addition, the use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is not regularly provided across all subjects. As a result, the requirements of the National Curriculum are not met.

29 In Years 10 and 11 pupils now have some choice and this has been increased in the current Year 10 where one option band extends across most of the year group. Pupils choose two out of six subjects covering the humanities, expressive arts, business studies and physical education. The provision for the pupils in Alpha and A classes is very good and includes classics, modern languages and the three separate sciences. A small number of pupils are entered for 14 GCSE subjects; some for 13 but most take 12. The provision for the lower-attaining pupils is good and now includes one option choice and vocational education in art and design or ICT. These pupils take up to six full GCSE subjects. For Year 10 pupils in Ambrose, Ansem, Beta and B classes timetabling arrangements now enable them to be taught in classes of similar attainment for each subject. As a result, standards and achievement amongst these pupils are improving. The number of pupils taking the dual science award has increased. Only just over half of boys take GCSE English literature compared to four-fifths of boys nationally.

30 The quality and range of learning opportunities are good although the timetable does not allow pupils throughout the school to be taught in classes of similar attainment in each subject. Such a structure would fully implement the school's curricular aim but at the present time the school does not maximise the equality of opportunity for all pupils. This concern applies especially to the Alpha and A classes.

31 The curriculum includes the full range of the National Curriculum subjects, religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Statutory requirements, with the exception of ICT and design and technology in Years 7 to 9, are met and the breadth, balance and relevance of the provision are good. In Years 7 to 9 higher-attaining pupils take classics and in Year 9 begin to study the three separate sciences. The strategies for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are developing; this has a good impact on subjects where skills of numeracy are necessary but many teachers are not applying the principles for improving skills of literacy with enough regularity and rigour.

32 The quality of the curriculum provision in the sixth form is very good. The school has extended its comprehensive vision to the sixth form. It consists of a wide range of Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level subjects, a variety of vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels and re-sits in English and mathematics at GCSE. Examination successes in vocational courses in 2000 have raised the profile of GNVQ amongst parents, students and staff. A striking feature of this provision is the annual study visit to Belgium. The school has successfully introduced the new post-16 provision including accreditation for key skills. Vocational A-level courses in business education and ICT are especially popular. These courses have a clear development vision amongst staff and the courses are well planned and coordinated. The leadership and management of the sixth form and the coherence of GNVQ provision are good. The broad, comprehensive curriculum matches a variety of students' needs and is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. This largely explains the growth of the sixth form. All students take religious education through the Christian Theology course and recreational activities are available for one period each week. Class sizes are viable and the provision is cost-effective.

33 The provision for extra-curricular activities, including sport, is very good. Teams and individuals in football, cricket, athletics, cross-country, swimming and squash have considerable success. The number of pupils participating is high and there are good links with local sports clubs. Pupils benefit from visiting coaches in football, squash, swimming and handball.

34 Most subjects offer time for revision and coursework outside the normal teaching time and this is planned to minimise conflicts. Each year there are trips abroad and numerous visits to museums, art

galleries and theatres. There is a tradition of productions involving music and drama and the Boys' Choir has an international reputation. The orchestra and choir involve a relatively small number of boys but this provision is supplemented with instrumental tuition. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme in Years 10 to 13 involves about 80 pupils and students, most of whom obtain bronze or silver awards. A debating club enters public speaking competitions and achieves success at a regional level.

35 The programme for PSHE has been introduced recently and is satisfactory, although the time allocated to it is limited. Sex and drugs education are effectively included within the curriculum in PSHE, religious education and science. Other social issues, citizenship, study skills and personal development are covered in registration periods. Teaching of PSHE is satisfactory or better when conducted by the regular class tutor although there are frequent interruptions to this, owing to absence. When temporary teachers cover registration periods, they are not required to teach PSHE, and coverage and continuity are adversely affected.

36 The range of topics covered in careers education is satisfactory and is steadily improving. Careers lessons are time-tabled for only half of Year 10 pupils and provision for the remainder is inadequate at present. The school intends to include the remaining pupils next year. A careers officer provides advice but interviews are restricted to those pupils who are likely to have difficulty securing employment. Overall, the quality of careers education is satisfactory. Work experience is provided in Year 10 and in the sixth form but mock interviews with employers are not arranged. Employers and other organisations provide opportunities for work placements and an industry day for Year 9 pupils. Community services, such as the police, play too limited a part in the curriculum. Overall, however, the contribution of the community to pupils' learning is good.

37 The relationships with partner institutions are satisfactory. Arrangements with feeder primary schools ensure that pupils are well prepared to transfer to secondary school. Relevant information is transferred and used to inform the grouping of pupils. Curricular links, bridging projects and joint ventures with feeder primary schools are less well developed although some sports coaching is provided. Representatives of universities and colleges advisory services give talks to sixth form students about higher education and admission procedures. Students are encouraged to visit campuses for taster experiences. Links with colleges of further education are less well developed.

38 The school has a brief policy statement on equal opportunities. The new buildings have disabled access, toilets and wide corridors. Prejudice, discrimination, racism and equality of opportunity are topics covered in religious education and PSHE. Whilst there are no serious equal opportunities issues the current structure of the timetable does not maximise the equality of opportunity for all pupils.

39 The curriculum is accessible to all pupils on the special needs register. The head of department and support staff know the pupils well and give them the encouragement and confidence to succeed in their academic work. The individual education plans (IEPs) drawn up from standardised assessment data are effective in ensuring that all pupils' needs are clearly identified at an early stage. They form the basis for all learning experiences and evaluation of outcomes. Where IEPs are used effectively across the curriculum they have a direct and positive impact on individual learning. Pupils with special educational needs develop self-confidence from the teaching approaches used and the variety of activities designed to develop social skills and talents in sports and music. They develop independent learning skills in set tasks in lessons. However, not all teachers follow this good practice of taking full account of targets set in pupils' IEPs in relating them to their own subject-teaching and, as a result, the progress of pupils in these instances is less secure.

40 Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, but not governed by a formal policy. Daily collective worship is provided for all pupils as part of the good provision for spiritual development. Assemblies are carefully planned and provide meaningful Christian messages, and religious education forms a substantial element in the curriculum for all pupils. A chaplain is available to pupils each week and there are regular Masses. Spiritual issues are regularly touched on in various areas of the curriculum, notably in English and history.

41 The school's constructive code of conduct is well known to pupils and forms the basis of the good provision for pupils' moral development. The school has high expectations of behaviour, and there is a fair tariff of punishments for any who misbehave. By their dedication and generosity with their time,

members of staff provide good role models for the pupils. Within the curriculum, moral issues are regularly discussed, for example, in geography, in topics about deforestation and the impact of tourism.

42 Provision for social development is satisfactory, but there are fewer opportunities than usually found for pupils to exercise independence and responsibility. There are prefects, a sixth form committee, librarians and sports captains, but no school council. The school raises money for a good range of charities, locally and world-wide including a school in Uganda and a hospice for babies in Liverpool. Social provision is enhanced by the good range of clubs and sports teams, and by the improved catering accommodation, where breakfast and lunch are now available in pleasant surroundings.

43 There are very good opportunities for cultural development throughout the curriculum. There is outstanding provision of extra-curricular choral activities. There are regular cultural events in school and pupils visit theatres, art galleries and concerts. Educational visits abroad take place annually to enrich different areas of the curriculum. Through subjects such as art and geography, pupils gain insights into a good range of other world cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

44 Child protection procedures are in place and arrangements for the health, safety and welfare of pupils are satisfactory. Attendance and behaviour are effectively monitored and promoted. Support for personal development is satisfactory. Several improvements have taken place since the previous inspection although the same pastoral difficulties exist because of the split site. Parents are generally satisfied with the quality of care and support.

45 Child protection procedures were not in place at the time of the previous inspection but appropriate measures are now taken. Arrangements to assess risk and undertake safety checks are in place. However, the physical education department does not adequately deal with some aspects of health and safety. Matters of health and safety were brought to the department's attention during the previous inspection. First aid cover is adequate at both sites but there is not a medical room where pupils can be treated in the event of more serious needs. Pupils' welfare is served well by external agencies.

46 Relations between adults and pupils and students are very good and consequently pupils receive an adequate level of care. The effects of the split site inhibit at times prompt accessibility to tutors and heads of year. When pupils at lower school spend part of their week at the main site, better arrangements could be made to help them integrate more positively into the life of the building, especially at breaks and the lunch time.

47 Induction arrangements for pupils at the lower school are good. Induction arrangements for new female students in the sixth form are also good but not quite enough attention is given to ensuring their smooth and sensitive integration into the whole of the school. Facilities and pastoral care for male and female students in the sixth form are good.

48 Behaviour is closely monitored and the strategies, to encourage good behaviour and improve poorer behaviour, are effective. The school works well with parents particularly when individual corrective plans are needed.

49 Attendance is recorded manually; this inhibits the school's ability to track, efficiently and promptly, truancy and punctuality. An overview of whole school and year group trends is time-consuming to produce. An electronic system is to be introduced soon. Nevertheless, heads of year diligently check absence and lateness and contact parents accordingly. The school has highlighted ten statements of achievement that are used to monitor and promote behaviour, attendance and homework; the system is successful with the majority of pupils.

50 Some aspects of pupils' personal development are well supported. Worthwhile educational visits, sport and the Boys' Choir provide enriching experiences although the number of pupils and students participating is not always high. Only a few pupils benefit from mentoring and very few formal responsibilities, such as a pupil/student council, are available.

51 Access to careers and higher education guidance, although improved since the previous inspection, is uneven. Personal, social and health education is included in registration periods and presents insufficient time and opportunities for pupils to explore fully many issues or to develop responsible and mature independence. The absence of involvement of specialist agencies in the programme inhibits pupils' appreciation of the value of community services.

52 The systems for identifying and supporting pupils in need of extra help and the arrangements for reviewing the progress of pupils with individual education plans and statements of educational needs are good. The monitoring and assessment of pupils in withdrawal groups are very good. Where learning support is available in the classroom it is very good, helping pupils to learn with increased confidence and to achieve well. The learning support assistants also make an effective contribution towards the general well-being of pupils through the good relationships they have built up over time. Annual and Transitional Reviews for pupils with statements ensure that they have positive input at all stages of development. There is very effective liaison with the careers adviser, appropriate external agencies and specialist centres. Although in its early stages, firm links are being established with a new school for autistic children through the head of special needs.

53 The school is developing its assessment strategies, mainly linked to its work on pupil-tracking and target-setting. These have still to be adequately embraced by all teachers and departments. Good progress has been made in collecting data from test scores, including standardised tests. Year 11 pupils and sixth-form students understand their predicted grades and their progress towards them. This is a positive achievement in the use of the data. Boys are encouraged to set their own targets for improvement. The school is moving towards involving younger pupils in similar processes. At present these are not established fully and medium-term assessment to match the planning of work to pupils' learning needs is insufficiently rigorous. Teachers' marking is generally helpful but is not always consistent within and between subjects. Day-to-day assessment, especially with middle and lower-attaining pupils, is not widely practised except in the most successful teaching. Generally this daily use of assessment is unsatisfactory. Whilst assessment in departments is largely accurate it is not used sufficiently to plan for the appropriate achievement of differing groups of pupils in lessons. Younger pupils especially are not sufficiently involved in their own learning and self-assessment and there is a tendency for teaching styles to be dominated by teacher input. As a consequence, the results of assessment by teachers are not used to guide teachers towards more use of active learning when this is appropriate.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

54 Parents are correct in having a high regard for the school and in valuing the effective partnership the school has with them. The situation is similar to that reported at the previous inspection. Parents are very keen to send their children to the school. They value the quality of education provided and are very supportive of most aspects of the school's work. Inspectors share the views of parents that the school is providing a good Catholic education for boys. Parents are rightly impressed by the quality of educational visits. Their main concerns relate to the grouping of pupils based on prior attainment, some aspects of teaching, information about pupils' progress and homework. A minority is not convinced that all pupils are treated equally. It is the inspectors' judgement that this is not a major issue, although one that the school should be more sensitive to and ensure more overtly than at present that average and below-average pupils are sometimes taught by teachers known to be amongst the best in the school.

55 The quality of general information for parents is good. Communications with parents about behaviour and attendance are frequent and mostly effective. Annual school reports and those of interim internal examination results have recently been improved and now include National Curriculum levels and targeted GCSE grades. However, reports do not always describe adequately what pupils know, understand and can do. Some remarks about progress are not related to attainment and targets for improvement are not subject-specific or measurable, usually focusing only on effort. Although parents are well represented as governors and the school consults with the parents association from time to time, the school does not regularly seek the views of parents about aspects of its provision. It has not checked whether parents have skills to offer the school in order to enrich the quality of curricular experiences. Curricular information events and workshops for parents do not feature in the school calendar.

56 Parents' attendance is good at induction meetings, parent teachers' meetings, proclamation night,

and meetings where pupils' options and careers are discussed. Parents support sports events well and very enthusiastic support is given to the activities of the Boys' Choir. A parents' association actively supports the school financially and in some practical ways.

57 The school says that most parents encourage their children with their homework but a minority does not sufficiently encourage or ensure the highest levels of attendance and punctuality. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are appropriately involved in the process of assessment, individual educational plans and review of progress.

58 The special educational needs department has established positive relationships with parents. They are fully informed of the statutory requirements laid down in the Code of Practice.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

59 The quality of leadership and management in the school is good. The headteacher and his two deputies have maintained a strong vision for the school based on its Catholic mission and character. The headteacher values all members of the school community as individuals with individual interests and needs. He communicates with staff with a quiet, sensitive authority. Although his style is to delegate responsibilities, he is very aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. He strives to share responsibility for major decision taking. He has led the move to improve the buildings and there has been marked success in recent years in an extensive capital building programme that has led to some excellent provision on the main site. Efforts continue to be made to finish this endeavour by further extensions in order that the lower school site can close and pupils and facilities be accommodated on the main site. The headteacher has a clear view of learning and teaching in the years ahead based on extensive use of ICT and much of the capital provision reflects this. At present this is not a clear focus for the school as a whole and the management of development and improvement in learning and teaching in all their aspects require more concerted attention. The school's development planning has improved significantly since the previous inspection but teaching and learning are not at its core. It is significant, however, that the new performance management policy's rationale has teaching and learning as its central focus. However, it is too new for it to currently be part of daily practice and planning. Whilst there have been improvements in important areas since the previous inspection, many of them as a result of the headteacher's quiet but purposeful insistence, the forum for development and change is narrow. It is not sufficiently representative of all teachers, lacks bite, and a buzz of commitment and anticipation linked to practicality, planning and realistic goal-setting. The school is insufficiently open, adventurous and self-evaluative.

60 The wider leadership team embraces the assistant deputy headteachers and the senior teachers. This group is generally effective in the fulfilment of specified organisational tasks but is not a driving force for educational development and change.

61 A strength of the school, however, lies in the work undertaken by some members of the leadership team in devising an effective tracking and reporting system. This is designed to monitor the progress pupils make towards agreed targets related to examination or National Curriculum requirements. This has implications for teaching and learning and includes procedures to hold teachers and departments to account in relation to results in examinations and performance in classes. It aims to tackle areas of underachievement. However, in a sense the focus starts at the end of the process, evaluating results rather than being used at the beginning to improve teaching and learning practices. There is a policy for observing teaching with a view to development and improvement, but at present this is in its infancy and not embedded as accepted and valued practice by all teachers. There is some sense of complacency amongst some staff since the examination results of the higher attainers are well above average. Whilst it is true that achievement amongst other pupils is better than at the time of the previous inspection, standards at present do not match the expectations that might be held for such pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11. The school does not set itself sufficiently demanding challenges for all pupils that are rooted in their performance on a day-to-day basis in lessons. In a third of the teaching this is noticeable; it is also significant that much of the good or better teaching is with higher-attaining pupils. Heads of department do not systematically and extensively monitor teaching and learning in their subject areas; a proportion of their non-contact time each term is not dedicated to this aid to departmental improvement and development. As a result good practice is rarely shared and approaches to teaching and learning in support of some of the school's policies, for assessment for example, lack coherence. The school has not identified in policy what might be deemed good practice in teaching and

learning.

62 The pastoral system is one of the strengths of the school and well managed by the heads of year. They relate well to the school's long tradition since 1842 in setting the tone and ambience of the school's caring environment.

63 The governing body is well informed and responsive to guidance given it by the management of the school. In consequence it is able to question and monitor the work of the school through processes of critical collaboration and robust discussion. It recognises when there are key areas for change but leaves the detail to the school's management. In this respect it does not take sufficient action to be more fully aware itself of how the school might improve further. It also recognises the need to be vigilant that the learning needs of all pupils are met. Committees meet regularly and relate well to the full governing body. As a result the governors play a significant part in the strategic development of the school and fulfil their roles in relation to developmental and financial planning. Governors, too, wish to ensure that the school is true to its long tradition and good reputation.

64 The growing sixth form is well managed and the leadership given to the new vocational courses is especially good. The head of sixth form has worked effectively with colleagues in introducing the new Advanced Subsidiary [AS] courses. The school development plan has targets designed to make the sixth form an attractive proposition for students, remaining true to the Catholic character of the school. A major challenge of which the sixth form staff is aware is to mould the various course-related groupings amongst sixth-formers into a sense of common sixth-form identity. The sixth form prepares its students well in their applications for places in higher education.

65 The special needs department is very well led. The coordinator gives clear educational guidance and ensures that through her professional expertise and management daily routines run smoothly and consistently. All staff in the department is committed to improvement in standards and there is a good team spirit. Departmental procedures and goals are firmly based on a comprehensive programme of assessment data that tracks individual progress over a period of time. The Code of Practice is now fully implemented. The assessment policy and procedures are firmly established on regularly administered tests which identify all pupils with needs early, and provide full details of present progress levels and information for future learning. Links with departmental representatives are now more formalised. They meet twice a term and exchange information on individual progress and any problems encountered with individual pupils.

66 The administrative and non-teaching staff provides the school with good support. Day-to-day administration is efficient and led well by the office managers and bursar. The care-taking staff is successful in ensuring a clean, secure and graffiti-free school environment. However, the school does not do enough to instil in boys the thoughtlessness of throwing down litter outside the buildings.

67 The financial management of the school is hampered by the costs of maintaining the split site, the lower school part of which is in dilapidated buildings, which incur high maintenance costs. In addition the school, by virtue of changes in its status, has suffered significant budget reductions and has incurred an overall budget deficit. However, the head and governors have taken positive steps to reduce revenue costs and to repay the deficit, with the cooperation of the local education authority, by means of a three-year plan. A five-year financial strategy has also been put in place.

68 The governors, through the services of an Independent Review Officer, monitor the budget carefully. The most recent auditor's report declared that the financial systems at the school are generally operated extremely well, and made only a few minor recommendations for changes, which are being adopted.

69 The school is fully committed to the principles of best value and constantly seeks to ensure that it obtains good value by adhering to strict tender and contract procedures, and by comparing costs carefully, for example through the work of the bursar in establishing a consortium of school bursars in the area. The costs of maintaining the sixth form are in balance, and specific grants are used appropriately for the purposes for which they were intended. The challenges set in providing a wide range of sixth form courses within the constraints of the staffing budget are an example of best value principles being applied.

70 Overall, the school gives good value for money. This judgement takes fully into account the improvements made since the previous inspection, the range of social backgrounds and overall attainment of the pupils on entry to the school, their good overall attainment and achievement in relation to national averages, their very good attitudes and behaviour and the comparatively lower funding of the school in comparison with other schools in the area.

71 Staffing is adequate. Teachers are qualified to teach the curriculum and are mostly deployed in accordance with their expertise. Many teachers are long-serving but recent recruitment is broadening the mix of experience. There has been a reasonable level of staff development, although more could be focused on teaching and learning. There is a thorough performance management policy in place and the school is committed to the development of all its staff.

72 The overall quality of the accommodation for teaching is satisfactory. However, the contrast in quality between the relatively new buildings on the main school site where much of the teaching accommodation is excellent, and the condition of the lower school which is, at best, barely adequate, is stark. The accommodation at the lower school site is not conducive to a safe, secure and positive learning environment. Many features, for example, furniture and flooring, require adults and pupils to exercise great caution in order to maintain safety. For teaching in English, maths, science, design and technology and ICT, the accommodation at the lower school is poor. Where the accommodation at the lower school site is adequate, it is largely because of the efforts of teachers, for example, in the history and language rooms, to make the learning environment more stimulating and attractive through display. The overall quality of the teaching accommodation in the college is good in a number of areas, notably ICT and design and technology, but the school's planning and teaching are not making the best of the facilities in these subjects. Music facilities are unsatisfactory because they are dispersed, which results in problems of access to resources, and the lack of a suitable space restricts opportunities for teaching drama. The special educational needs department lacks reasonable office accommodation for the administration and storage of records and the conducting of interviews with pupils and parents.

73 Resources for learning are adequate throughout the school, other than in design and technology and ICT where they are good. Resources for electronics are good but the opportunities offered by the quality of the computer-aided design equipment are not fully explored. There are sufficient numbers of text books in most areas though some of these are in poor condition. The library has sufficient number and quality of resources to provide satisfactory support to pupils' learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74 In order to consolidate and develop improvements made since the previous inspection, the governors, headteacher and staff should focus on:

- (1) improving teaching and learning in a third of lessons and increasing levels of achievement of pupils by:
 - establishing systematic monitoring and support of teaching by senior managers and within departments,
 - seeking ways of sharing good practice, enabling pupils to be effective and motivated learners,
 - ensuring that lesson observations focus on areas for improvement or development,
 - using day-to-day assessment to give direction to the work of pupils with differing learning needs,
 - increasing the variety of learning and teaching styles used within a lesson or group of lessons,
 - being clearer about setting learning objectives for a lesson and checking with pupils whether these have been achieved;

See paragraphs 18-26, 53, 59, 61, 80, 106-108, 112, 114, 119-120, 134, 140, 145, 165

- (2) creating a more coherent and enthusiastic sense of vision and purpose in the management and development of the school by:
 - ensuring that the headteacher's emerging vision of the school's future is shared and influenced by all staff,
 - setting up more strategies that lead to all members of staff to feel they have a voice in the decision-making process,
 - establishing a greater sense of the staff as a team, with a more lively outlook related to the school's vision for its future,
 - encouraging the leadership team and middle managers to be more dynamic and have defined within their job descriptions clear responsibilities related to the school's review, self-evaluation and improvement;

See paragraphs 6, 20, 28, 40-43, 59, 60-61, 82, 84, 96, 117, 125, 145, 147

- (3) improving standards in the use of information and communication technology [ICT] across subjects, especially amongst higher-attaining pupils by:
 - creating effective monitoring and evaluation of the use of ICT across subjects to make sure that the requirements of the National Curriculum are met in Years 7 to 11,
 - increasing the time allocated for the teaching of ICT and making it more sequential so that learning is consolidated,
 - developing pupils' understanding of the impact of ICT on the fabric of society
 - sharing the good practice that exists in teaching and using ICT in order that all teachers become confident in its use and application,
 - introducing a more demanding course for higher-attaining pupils and extending it fully into Years 10 and 11,
 - making sure that the coordinator for ICT has sufficient status and time allocated to effect development,
 - maintaining records of pupils' capability in ICT and informing parents through reports of the progress their children are making.

See paragraphs 9, 12, 92, 130, 141-148, 168, 180

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

166

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

57

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	16	46	30	6	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1072	202
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	236	

Special educational needs

	Y7-11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	25	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	7

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	28

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.6
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	209	0	209

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	149	166	152
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	149	166	152
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 [75]	79 [71]	73 [61]
	National	63 [64]	66 [62]	59 [54]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 [36]	65 [62]	45 [24]
	National	28 [28]	42 [38]	30 [23]

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	163	170	159
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	163	170	159
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 [80]	81 [70]	76 [69]
	National	64 [64]	66 [64]	62 [59]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 [39]	50 [41]	51 [34]
	National	31 [31]	39 [37]	29 [28]

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	207	0	207

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	102	185	202
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	102	185	202
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	49.2 [43.5]	89.4 [86.0]	97.6 [100]
	National	49.2 [47.9]	88.8 [88.5]	94.4 [94.0]

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40.2 [38.4]
	National	38.6 [38.0]

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year Who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	54	2	56

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	23.4	27.5	23.5 [18.8]	1.5	0.0	1.5 [n/a]
National	17.6	18.4	18.0 [19.3]	2.6	2.8	2.7 [3.3]

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or Units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	29	100
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	17
Black – other	16
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	6
White	1229
Any other minority ethnic group	4

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage	1	
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese	1	
White	46	2
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 - 13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	72.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 - 13

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	200

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3147346
Total expenditure	3310363
Expenditure per pupil	2750

Balance brought forward from previous year	76374
Balance carried forward to next year	(86643)

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	81
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.4
Key Stage 4	20.5

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1274

Number of questionnaires returned

174

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38.5	54.0	5.2	2.3	0.0
My child is making good progress in school.	43.7	46.0	4.0	2.9	3.4
Behaviour in the school is good.	33.3	47.7	8.0	4.6	6.4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24.7	49.4	16.1	8.1	1.7
The teaching is good.	38.5	47.1	7.7	0.0	6.7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27.6	41.4	21.3	5.2	4.5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44.8	44.8	6.9	1.2	2.3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57.0	35.0	6.3	0.0	1.7
The school works closely with parents.	24.7	43.7	21.9	5.1	4.6
The school is well led and managed.	43.7	40.8	4.6	1.1	9.8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45.4	46.0	5.8	1.7	1.1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33.9	35.6	11.5	5.1	13.9

- At a meeting before the inspection, attended by 55 parents, views were expressed that were similar to the weighting indicated in this analysis of responses to the questionnaire.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

75 Pupils' standards of work in English as seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because teaching is good overall, and pupils' behave well and show positive attitudes in most lessons. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. When they start in Year 7 they have average standards. They make good but rather narrow progress in their first three years such that achievement in speaking is restricted, and there is some general underachievement in middle band classes in years 7 and 8. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 in relation to the above average standards reached by the end of Year 9. However, by and large pupils' achieve well in English as they move through the school. This is because pupils and teachers work well together, and good use is made of the additional curricular time available to some groups in Years 9 to 11. Achievement in the sixth form is good. Through the school, therefore, the negative impact of some lack of books and some pupils having to be taught in unsuitable classrooms is minimised.

76 Results of national tests in English show a slight decline in the average points score over the past five years but they remain above the national average, and well above those achieved in schools with a similar intake of pupils. Whilst statistically slightly inferior to those in maths and science, 2000 results reflect a comparable performance, given that boys nationally do less well in English. GCSE results have improved. In 2000 English language results were above the national average and well above those achieved by boys nationally. English literature results, which were well above national average, were distorted by the school only entering just over half of the year group, as opposed to the typical four-fifths in schools across the country. Given that only higher-attaining classes were entered, and that these were not formed on the basis of their attainment in English alone, this restrictive policy resulted in inequality of opportunity. A-level results in 2000 were above average; there was an increase in the proportion of passes and of those at the higher grades A and B.

77 These good results were reflected in the standards of work seen during the inspection, although oral skills in all year groups were inferior to written standards, with the exception of a minority of pupils in upper streams and some pupils in lower streams. This is a consequence of the emphasis placed on written work by teachers such that almost any activity whether reading, writing, listening or watching, leads to an inevitable written task. When invited to discuss as a whole class or in pairs, many pupils have an eye to the task ahead and prefer to note brief ideas down rather than engaging in a stimulating sharing of ideas and expression. Teachers often reinforce this prejudice by setting down rigid guidelines, and not encouraging the pursuit of original or unorthodox ideas. Generally, pupils are not encouraged to speak loudly and slowly enough to be heard by their audience. As a result their very good listening skills, which they use very effectively to follow the teacher's line of thought, do not stimulate thoughtful responses to each other's ideas. This weakness is even evident in some sixth-form lessons. In a good A-level lesson students empathised with Mark Antony in Egypt about to face the Roman armies, but over half answered questions from the teacher far too quietly for other pupils to easily understand their viewpoint.

78 The emphasis placed on written tasks and on the demands of examinations brings about good results in the national tests at the end of Year 9, and in GCSE and A-level. Teachers are careful to use technical terms, and to expect their use by pupils. In Years 9 to 11 the criteria for success in a task or test are often explained to pupils so that they understand what their writing needs to demonstrate to achieve a particular grade. The regular assessment of pupils' work helps them to focus on their standards and progress. The marking which underpins such a system is disappointing, although GCSE coursework pieces are well marked. Though work is quickly marked, the marking is too often cursory, with little correction and few, if any, suggestions for improvement. Marking of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory, except in the case of some Becket and Barlow classes where there is detailed guidance. For most pupils there is no reference to issues such as structure, paragraphing, varied sentence lengths, or punctuation, and no consistent system for giving pupils clear targets to help to improve work. This leads to underachievement by some middle-band pupils in Years 7 and 8. Teachers wrongly believe that regular notes and grammar exercises compensate for thin marking, but

in fact most pupils spend too much time on such work, and too little on extended writing. During the inspection some classes had done no extended writing in more than eight school weeks. Nonetheless, teaching is satisfactory as most teachers manage classes well, use a range of methods within lessons, and keep a close eye on the requirements of the National Curriculum.

79 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and are invariably successful in GCSE examinations. Teachers are sensitive to their needs, but also expect them to work hard and realise their potential. Pupils are taught to organise their work, and to break tasks into manageable units with carefully crafted responses. A lower-band Year 11 class responded particularly well to a poetry lesson, taking pride in identifying and examining the effectiveness of imagery whilst also responding to a wider debate with the teacher about the tensions between adolescents and their parents, and the joys, frustrations and responsibilities of parenthood. Pupils in the higher bands are set traditional and very challenging work. This leads to the confident handling and exploration of complex texts and sophisticated ideas. A Year 9 class used their understanding of such terms as 'irony' and 'personification' to compare and cross-reference scenes in 'Macbeth'. This helped them to realise how Shakespeare's language contrasted the hero's rantings with the calm organisation of his opponents. Such work forms the basis of the quality of GCSE and A-level literature work, where pupils and students combine high-level analytical skills with colourful and vigorous English. In contrast teachers' expectations of productivity and behaviour of pupils in the middle bands can be too variable.

80 The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Both are satisfactory, but with some limitations in Years 7 to 9, and consistently good in Years 10 and 11 and with A-level groups. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory when teachers fail to manage or motivate classes adequately, or lose sight of the level of work that should be expected of a class. All teachers demonstrate good knowledge of their subject. The most effective amend how they communicate this according to what they want pupils to learn and how the particular character of the class can best be engaged. Whilst teachers have good relationships with pupils, too many lessons are rather dry, humourless and predictable. Despite this, a strength of English teaching is the way in which the spiritual and moral development of pupils is given prominence. This allowed a top- band-Year 8 class to respond to the emotion in war poems written and read by their classmates, and to gain deep insight into the situation of the ex-soldier in Wilfred Owen's poem 'Disabled', who, as one boy put it, "doesn't feel whole any more."

81 Most pupils respond well to the strict work ethic in English, as is evidenced in the organised and diligent approach seen in books and coursework files. There is a willingness to conform and to follow the lesson structure set by the teacher. A minority of pupils in all years display unwilling attitudes in both oral and written tasks. With skilled handling their readiness to question things is turned into an ability to explore ideas. When teachers show less confidence, or lower the standards of work or behaviour expected, pupils' attitudes and learning can deteriorate. In one Year 11 class this resulted in significant misbehaviour by several boys, and a third of the group doing little more than embellishing the title of the piece they were supposed to be writing. In contrast, a similar Year 8 class worked well on a topic about a bank raid because the teacher set out clearly what was expected and made good use of alternating brisk question and answer sessions with periods of silent writing.

82 The English department benefits from good leadership and management which has generated a strong sense of teamwork and a desire to improve, balanced by a sensitivity to the needs of pupils. There is regular observation of teachers at work, and detailed monitoring of how well pupils are progressing. Neither system is fully used to ask searching questions about how pupils learn best, with consequent amendments to teaching style or syllabus. Classrooms range from very good on the main site to unsatisfactory in the lower school building. On both sites the general good quality of displays of pupils' work is marred by some simplistic examples. Book resources are unsatisfactory: several classes were observed having to share dog-eared texts and the department does not have enough texts to allow more pupils to be entered for GCSE English literature.

83 There has been good improvement since the previous inspection and this is reflected in improved standards of attainment in examinations, better awareness of how to teach pupils in the lower bands, more varied teaching styles, and a broadening of writing styles. Further progress can be made if the departmental development plan becomes a vigorous and detailed stimulus to change. This process would enable teachers to debate and agree how to extend and improve pupils' learning. The agenda should include improved marking, more valuable oral work, a switch from reliance on notes and

exercises to more extended writing by pupils, and more stimulating teaching especially to middle sets or disaffected pupils. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 would also benefit from a more planned and consistent experience in ICT and drama skills.

Key skills : the use of the skills of literacy to support learning across the curriculum

84 Apart from important changes in the library, there has been little development in the strategies for improving the level of pupils' literacy skills. Literacy levels amongst pupils are satisfactory; school strategies for ensuring further improvement or refinement of such skills are unsatisfactory. A brief policy reminds all departments of their responsibility for literacy, and offers a few suggestions as to how this might be tackled. The lack of a coordinator or working group however has resulted in literacy having a low profile. There is little awareness of the experiences and expectations which pupils are bringing with them from their experience of the 'Literacy Hour' at primary school. There is good practice, but it is inconsistent both across the school and within departments.

85 Pupils' written work is usually neat and well organised, and this is encouraged and commended by teachers, including in sketch books in art and design. Marking pays good attention to standards, but too little to error and correction. As a consequence spelling errors are frequent, even in the work of higher-attaining boys. Dictionaries are rarely available or used. Key words are on display in some classrooms, but they are only well used in geography and history where they are colour-coded to link in with year groups. Paradoxically, technical terms relevant to subjects are well introduced in most lessons so that pupils are familiar with their meaning and spelling, and comfortable in using them. Many pupils are skilled at note-taking, but extended writing is too rarely practised in science, music, and English. In modern languages this is the case in years 7 to 9, but there is very good and sometimes imaginative work in Years 10 and 11. In geography in Year 7, pupils wrote newspaper-style accounts of flooding in Bangladesh. Writing frames are used effectively to guide the work of lower-attaining pupils and to support field-work in geography and theory in physical education.

86 In reading, pupils are adept at extracting information from texts, and at browsing for information in newspapers and magazines. All pupils are expected to read extensively in modern languages. Whilst able to research topics, few pupils outside the sixth form or top band see the value of reading round a topic, and fewer still gain pleasure from leisure reading. The libraries are attractive, very well organised, and provide good and imaginative support to literacy and study. The range of books is satisfactory but borrowing rates are low, though increasing.

87 Pupils are expected to discuss work in pairs and groups, and occasional debates take place. Good oral work was noted in geography and history. In most other subjects pupils listen well, but are too reliant on teachers' questions for direction and ideas. Thus pupils' evaluation of performance in physical education is too limited. Too many teachers see oral work as allowing pupils to talk, rather than training them to speak clearly and appropriately. The latter would allow more original ideas to be expressed and shared, and better understanding and insight to take place.

MATHEMATICS

88 Standards of work throughout the school are above average. These standards are achieved through rigorous teaching that is firmly based on knowledge, understanding and application of fundamental mathematical principles. By the end of Year 9 all pupils achieve well from their starting point on entry. Higher and average-attaining pupils continue to achieve well in Years 10 and 11; lower-attaining pupils achieve satisfactorily at this stage. Sixth-form students achieve well. Pupils and students have good attitudes towards their work and are keen to achieve success in external examinations. This contributes to the good learning. Overall, pupils make good progress throughout the school. They are competent in using numerical skills, which are above average.

89 In 2000, results in national tests for fourteen-year olds were well above the national average; 54 per cent of pupils exceeded the level expected for their age. Results were very high compared to similar schools. The results exceeded the school's own targets which were realistically based on pupils' starting points in Year 7. The quality of pupils' performance has been consistently maintained over the past four years. In 2000 the rate of progress exceeded the national trend.

90 The good results in Years 7 to 9 are a reflection of secure foundations in arithmetic, algebra and shape and measure. Progression through the scheme of work is well paced, allowing time for topics to be revisited and reinforced. Where appropriate, teachers introduce work beyond the bounds of the curriculum that enhances pupils' confidence and stimulates independent thought. For example, in Year 9 pupils drew on historical information drawn from the Internet to investigate the origins of standard measure and work out variations in the size of the base of the pyramid at Giza. Thoughtful preparation for the lesson resulted in pupils extracting and interpreting information, practising complex operational skills on calculators, and thinking for themselves. Pupils' numerical and computational skills on entry to the school are average. Teachers build on these through the inclusion of mental activities in lesson plans. Some good examples of fast moving oral work were seen, for instance when a class of lower-attaining pupils in Year 7 practised mental addition through the substitution of numbers in simple algebraic expressions. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is sound and appropriate. The specialist teacher uses a wealth of ideas and strategies to stimulate interest. These could usefully be shared to broaden the range of teaching techniques in other classes of lower-attaining pupils.

91 All pupils, including those with special educational needs, have access to GCSE examinations. Almost all gain accreditation at grades A*-G. In 2000, results were above the national average at A*-C and at the higher grades A*/A. Results have risen significantly, at a faster rate than the national trend, since the previous inspection. This is because the school took specific action to raise the standards of average-attaining pupils. Improvement in the coursework element of examination work was of particular significance.

92 Success in external examinations is attributed to pupils' self-motivation and teachers' drive to sustain and further improve standards. Strong emphasis is placed on the understanding and application of newly acquired knowledge and correct use of mathematical terminology. Pupils' proficiency in numeracy is confirmed by the high level of success in the Merseyside tests – half the pupils regularly gain the gold award and others the silver. Pupils have a better grasp of algebra than found in many schools and this has a positive impact on overall standards of work. Investigative work is an integral part of mathematical studies and some good examples of innovative thinking and reasoning were observed. By the end of Year 11 many pupils can prove the validity of their predictions and fit generalised conclusions to known algebraic expressions. Higher and average-attaining pupils competently transfer skills and techniques to more complex problems. Other pupils need to develop these skills further – the lowest-attaining pupils sometimes find more difficulty in interpreting questions than in carrying out the mathematics involved. Pupils collect, collate, and handle data satisfactorily and make good use of these skills in other subjects. Minimal use is made of ICT to present mathematical information for visual impact – the school is missing opportunities in this aspect. The teaching in Years 10 and 11 follows a structured pattern, mainly based on whole-class teaching followed by a class activity. This works well for higher and average-attaining pupils. Lower-attaining pupils would benefit from the use of a wider variety of teaching styles, including some which focus more specifically on individual needs.

93 Students' results in A-level examinations were above average in 2000. A consistently good standard has been maintained since the previous inspection with high proportions of students achieving grades A, B and C. A-level mathematics is taught through a modular approach that successfully enables students to progressively evaluate their own progress. The transition from GCSE to A-level is carefully planned so that the appropriate elements of pure mathematics are in place to support new aspects of statistics and mechanics. Sixth-form work incorporates a high degree of intellectual challenge whilst providing good support for students' individual needs and aspirations. Students engage in mature discussion with teachers and are not afraid to have their debate used as a basis for the development of the lesson. For example, in a lesson on the integration of algebraic and trigonometric functions, students bounced ideas amongst themselves and so provoked further debate with the teacher. This continued after the lesson, as was seen to be the case on other occasions.

94 Attitudes to learning and behaviour are good. Pupils are generally attentive, respond well to challenge, and listen to and learn from each other. This is exemplified in the spirit with which pupils in a number of classes are coping with the considerable number of temporary teachers working in the department at present. The school is managing this difficult situation well and has endeavoured to find specialist teachers of mathematics wherever possible. The school is ensuring that pupils rigidly follow the scheduled scheme of work but pupils are inevitably missing the security that emanates from a regular teacher.

95 Overall, teaching and learning are good throughout the school. They were good in 8 of the 12 lessons observed and satisfactory in all but one of the others. A particular strength in the teaching is the establishment of a secure learning environment in which a good work ethic prevails. Teaching is sharply focused on clearly defined targets. Skilful questioning ensures pupils build up their understanding of fundamental concepts step-by-step. Pupils retain knowledge well because written exercises are well planned. Learning includes sufficient opportunities to consolidate understanding without being over-repetitious. A characteristic feature of the best lessons is the fast pace linked to challenging expectations. This is particularly evident in the sixth form and classes of higher-attaining pupils. Where teaching was satisfactory in contrast to good, pupils completed the work set but were easily distracted when not under the watchful eye of the teacher. The style of presentation in these lessons, mostly based on a routine of exposition from the teacher followed by class activity, is not sufficiently varied to engage pupils' interest all of the time, as result learning is less secure. This is most noticeable in classes of lower-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 where achievement is satisfactory but could be even better. Teachers would benefit from sharing the good practices already in use in some classes. The minimal amount of unsatisfactory teaching was due to the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils whose attitudes prevented the lesson's objectives being achieved.

96 The department is driven by the motivation to achieve and sustain good standards. The leadership is good but the long-term absence of key teachers is delaying the full implementation of priorities in the development plan, for example the monitoring of teaching to share the best practices. Good, regular assessment of pupils' progress provides valuable information that forms the basis for target setting. This ensures there is no complacency even though pupils and students are achieving well overall. Standards have continued to rise since the previous inspection, especially those of average-attaining pupils. There is capacity for further improvement in the achievement of lower-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11; this has been identified by the school and action is to be taken to lead teachers of the subject to more systematic approaches to improvement in teaching and learning. Overall, it is a tribute to the flexibility of the teachers that a calm learning atmosphere prevails despite the significant amount of temporary staffing.

NUMERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

97 Numerical skills are above average throughout the school. They are regularly reinforced in mathematics lessons and widely used in other subjects. Pupils use calculators where appropriate and are rightfully discouraged from using them when operations can be carried out mentally. Mathematical concepts are well applied across the whole curriculum, for example where measurement, graphical and statistical skills are used in science and geography.

SCIENCE

98 Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Years 7 to 9, average in Years 10 and 11 and well above average in the sixth form. These standards are achieved because of good teaching in both Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and satisfactory teaching in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 are good; in relation to standards at the start of Year 10, achievement is satisfactory and in relation to standards at the start of the sixth form, good. Pupils' attitudes also cause the quality of their learning in science to be good. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

99 In 2000, the pupils' results in national tests for 14 year olds was above average compared with all schools. They were very high compared to schools of similar backgrounds. Results have improved since the previous inspection at a similar rate to the national trend. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age improved significantly in 2000 compared with 1999. Attainment in science is similar to that in mathematics but better than in English by the time the pupils are 14.

100 Pupils are entered for a variety of GCSE science examinations depending upon their attainment. High-attaining pupils take three separate science GCSE examinations; middle-attaining pupils take the GCSE double-award science examination whilst lower-attaining pupils take the GCSE single-award science examination. Some lower-attaining pupils are entered for the Certificate of Achievement in Science with the possibility of also being entered for the GCSE single-award science examination. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in at least one science examination has increased since the

previous inspection and is in line with what would be expected nationally. Since the previous inspection the percentage of middle and lower-attaining pupils who have achieved at least a grade A*-C has increased. In the sixth form, students study GCE A-levels in physics, chemistry and biology. The proportion of students passing these examinations and gaining higher A/B grades in 2000 was well above the national average. Results in 2000 showed an improvement on previous years' results.

101 The range of inspection evidence, including lesson observation, work scrutiny and discussions with pupils and students indicate that overall standards of work throughout the school are above average. In the sixth form students have a very good knowledge and understanding of physics, chemistry and biology. They are able to use this knowledge and understanding very well to analyse scientific problems. For example, a Year 13 student of physics used his understanding of potential energy to predict how alpha particles behave as they approach an atomic nucleus. In all three sciences, due to good specialist teaching, students have developed practical skills that are well above average.

102 By the end of Year 11 standards of work are average overall. However there is some variability in standards between the different groups of pupils. Higher-attaining pupils produce high standards of work, for example, they write chemical equations accurately, calculate molecular masses and use this data to determine how much of a particular product will be produced in industrial processes. Middle and lower-attaining pupils achieve average standards of work generally. For example, middle-attaining pupils have a sound understanding of hormones and their function in the human body. Lower-attaining pupils understand the relationship of the visible spectrum to the electromagnetic spectrum. In some groups standards are lower; one such group had poor practical skills and a weak understanding of rates of reaction. Here poor attitudes and lack of motivation led to poor learning during the lesson.

103 By the end of Year 9 pupils have built on their previous scientific knowledge well and produce standards of work which are above average for their age. Here pupils have positive attitudes to science and this combined with good teaching improves their learning. An upper-attaining group of Year 8 pupils used their practical skills in chemistry to extract an indicator from red cabbage and successfully used it to test whether substances were strong acids or alkalis. Middle-attaining pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of conduction, convection and radiation and can explain these processes in terms of heat transfer. Lower-attaining pupils also achieve well in physics, chemistry and biology as a result of teaching that supports their learning well.

104 Throughout the school achievement is good. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is average for their age. By the age of 14 the most recent test results indicate that on average pupils are over two terms ahead of boys in other schools. In this age range teachers have developed effective schemes of work, which focus clearly on pupils' activity and learning outcomes. Combined with capable teaching and good pupils' interest and motivation this ensures that good progress is made. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Schemes of work focus more on detail of content rather than what scientific knowledge, understanding and skills should be learned; as a result pupils make slower, though satisfactory progress, in their learning. Students in the sixth form achieve well. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and convey theories and concepts to students with a good degree of clarity. As a result students learn well in all three sciences. Detailed sets of notes produced by specialists ensure that the students' good learning is effectively consolidated.

105 Teaching is good overall. Teachers in the sixth form have very good knowledge and understanding of science. They have established good working relationships with their students that enhance learning. Lessons and practical activities are well planned. For example, in a Year 13 chemistry class students were able to carry out a series of tests to determine changes to the co-ordination number of some transition metal ions. Careful planning of the activity combined with good background chemical knowledge led the students to make very good progress in this topic. They identified the species present and wrote balanced equations for their formation.

106 In Years 10 and 11 teaching is satisfactory. The proportion of good teaching in this age range is less than that seen nationally. This is due to factors such as use of a limited number of teaching styles. This, coupled with some groups' poor behaviour and attitude, led to occasional unsatisfactory teaching and learning. However attitudes in this age range are usually good.

107 In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching is also good. In this age range lessons are well planned in terms of

objectives and focus clearly on learning outcomes. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them in spite of little support being in evidence during the inspection. In lessons, pupils engage in a variety of class discussions which extend their understanding of science. In some lessons a good feature is the use of key words to focus this oral work. In a Year 8 lower-attaining group words were skilfully used by the teacher to clarify and reinforce the pupils' understanding of acids and alkalis. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is weak. This does not highlight their strengths and weaknesses or show them how to improve. In Years 7, 8 and 9 there is no indication of the National Curriculum level the pupils are working at. Marking is cursory with occasional encouraging comments. However the department has produced good procedures for tracking pupils' progress in science and is beginning to use this information to target underachieving pupils and groups.

108 The department benefits from a team of well-experienced and committed teachers and is well led and managed. Organisation of the department on a day to day basis is difficult due to its spread-out nature. However the technicians work hard and efficiently to ensure that it functions smoothly. Accommodation is adequate for the teaching of science. However the lower school laboratories do not present an attractive environment in which to learn science. Since the previous inspection the quality of teaching has improved. The department's programme of lesson observation is leading to some sharing of good practice and has a clearer focus than that found in some subjects. Changes to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, with more pupils taking Double Award Science, have improved the attainment of middle and lower-attaining pupils. The department makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' numeracy. For example, sixth-form students are given useful notes covering in detail the mathematical concepts and processes needed for success in A-level examinations in science. The provision for ICT in science lessons has increased. In order to improve further the department as a priority should improve the quality of its day-to-day assessment and strive to improve further the quality of teaching especially in Years 10 and 11.

ART AND DESIGN

109 Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average. In Years 7 to 11 standards are below average, and in the sixth form are average. These standards are such because the teaching is satisfactory overall, showing a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Pupils' achievement in relation to standards on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes are good, although the quality of the teaching is not good enough to be inspiring. These factors, together with a lack of bold approaches, cause the quality of learning in art and design to be no better than satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school.

110 Results in the GCSE examinations in 2000 were below average, with two-fifths of pupils achieving grades A*-C against a national average of one half. Over the previous three years results show some improvement although they are still below average. In the A-level examinations results were average in 2000. Over the previous three years these have shown some improvement, although very small numbers take the examination.

111 Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form; teaching in three out of eight lessons is good or better and only one unsatisfactory lesson occurred during the inspection. In the best lessons in Years 7 to 9, good, purposeful teacher-pupil relationships focused on the work. This helps pupils to draw freely, and make good gains in their ability and confidence in using line and pattern. In a lesson on drawing, based on the work of Gustav Klimt, there were good levels of interest and engagement with the work. This produced good learning. Teachers are aware of the difficulties which pupils with special educational needs have, and they adapt their teaching methods well. This produces good learning and good achievement by these pupils.

112 Weaker aspects of the teaching are seen when the teacher's subject knowledge is not good enough to set demanding work, and the tasks set are too easy for the pupils. This results in unsatisfactory learning, and pupils do not make the progress that they should in the lesson. In addition, materials are used in an unimaginative way, with pupils working on the same drawing for too long, without enough variety of activity. This means that they begin to work without thinking about what they are doing, and learning is not as good as it could be.

113 Sketchbooks are used for drawing from observation and from imagination, and to research the

work of artists and designers. This is an improvement since the previous inspection, and the school now fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum. However, there is little evidence of the use of ICT to support pupils' work. Three-dimensional work is also sparse, and is below average in standard. These factors help to keep standards below average in Years 7, 8 and 9.

114 In Years 10 and 11 teaching is satisfactory. There are strengths in the encouraging manner of teachers on a one-to-one basis, praising the efforts of pupils and guiding them towards using their strengths. This produces some good learning on an individual basis. There is a bold use of colour in low attainers, and some chalk pastel work is seen in which pupils achieve atmospheric effects. Higher attainers show good drawing skills, and all pupils achieve at a satisfactory level as a result of satisfactory teaching. However, too much of the work, especially painting, is completed on too small a scale, and pupils cannot learn to develop broader handling skills. This is a major reason why standards stay below average in Years 10 and 11.

115 In the sixth form teaching is satisfactory. Teachers show good subject knowledge, which means they can give good advice on a range of topics. In addition, a variety of materials and activities are available, and this promotes very good attitudes. Relationships between teachers and students are good. As a result of these factors, a good range of work is produced, including some boldly coloured fabric prints, which show a good grasp of the principles of design. Students are also encouraged to observe closely and they produce good studies of fruit, vegetables, and household objects.

116 Since the previous inspection improvement has been satisfactory. Standards have improved in Years 10 and 11, although they are still below average. The subject now fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum, and the work of a range of artists and designers is studied. Art and design makes a good contribution to cultural development by organising gallery visits and by studying the art of other cultures, for example, African and Egyptian art. Although the department has not produced policies on the development of skills of literacy and numeracy, pupils are encouraged to write in sketchbooks and they measure and estimate proportions when drawing.

117 The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The potential of art and design is not realised fully, and there is a lack of broad, bold approaches. Although teaching within the department has been monitored, its quality is uneven and it has not improved since the previous inspection. Because of these factors standards are below average and below those achieved by most other subjects in the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

118 Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average by the end of Year 9 because teaching and planning of the curriculum do not always provide pupils with a sufficiently coherent learning experience. Consequently pupils' achievement in relation to standards on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 are unsatisfactory. Standards of work are average by the end of Year 11 because teaching is satisfactory. As a result pupils' achieve satisfactorily in relation to their standards at the beginning of Year 10. Overall standards of work in the sixth form are average and pupils achieve well in relation to their standards at the start of the sixth form because they are well taught and take individual responsibility for their own work. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school although overall progress is adversely affected by their unsatisfactory achievement up to Year 9.

119 During Years 7 to 9 pupils do not make sufficient progress because insufficient attention is given to developing their ability to make decisions about designing and making both in the scheme of work and in individual lessons. Pupils do not learn how to take users' needs into account. For example in a timer project in Year 9 a set electronic circuit is encased in a rectangular vacuum formed plastic casing without considering how the casing relates to the way that people will use the timer. There is no coherent strategy to build up pupils' drawing skills and an understanding of their role in designing. They do not produce design folders that show an understanding of designing. Pupils acquire sound knowledge of using electronics for control. Pupils do not experience working in compliant materials or food and therefore the scheme of work does not fully comply with the requirements of the National Curriculum.

120 A further factor adversely affecting pupils' learning is that some classes are taught by teachers who do not have a specialist knowledge of the subject and the department has been adversely affected by recent staff changes and illness. Two-fifths of the lessons that were observed in Years 7 to 9 were

unsatisfactory because teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of the subject or through poor organisation. Lessons lasting for two hours were not organised sufficiently well to ensure that pupils' attention and learning were maintained throughout.

121 Overall, GCSE standards are close to the national average. The standards in GCSE classes in electronic products are above average, which is reflected in the examination results for the last three years. Pupils are able to build up circuits to meet specific requirements and their folders show ideas being tested and developed well. Consideration of other aspects of their designs, such as ergonomics is not as well developed. Pupils preparing for the short course GCSE in electronics products make very good progress and some succeed in taking the full course examination.

122 Standards in GCSE classes in resistant materials are below average but pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their standards at the start of the course. The GCSE results in this subject in 2000 and 1998 were well below average but in 1999 were average. Most projects also have an electronics element. Standards of making are often good and most pupils finish their products to a good standard. Most pupils are quite confident when using computer aided drawing and manufacturing techniques.

123 Pupils learn satisfactorily and make satisfactory progress during Years 10 and 11 because teaching is satisfactory and they receive thorough individual help from teachers who have a sound knowledge of electronics. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is similar to that of other pupils because of the thorough individual teaching related to their individual education plans.

124 In the sixth form, students achieve well in both the AS/A level technology course and the GNVQ manufacturing intermediate level course in relation to their standards at the beginning of the sixth form. Standards are above average in the former and below average in the latter. Very few students took either of these examinations in 2000 but their results were in line with the standards of the current larger groups. AS/A level students' knowledge of electronic control and design is good and pupils make good use of computer software for designing printed circuit boards. GNVQ students make sound use of computer-aided design and manufacture. Pupils learn well as a result of good teaching in which individual teaching develops students' ability to work independently.

125 There have been substantial improvements in accommodation and resources since the previous inspection, including substantial investment in computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment. However, this has not helped to raise standards, which are now lower than at the time of the previous inspection, although the range of opportunities, particularly in the sixth form, is better. Leadership and management of the department fail to ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum are met. Whilst the subject administration is satisfactory, and procedures for assessment and moderation are carried out thoroughly, there is no overall strategy to raise standards starting as soon as pupils enter the school in Year 7.

GEOGRAPHY

126 Standards of work seen in geography during the inspection are above average overall. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and in Years 10 and 11 they are well above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. This enables pupils to make good progress in the school and is supplemented by their good attitudes that also cause the quality of learning in geography to be good. Pupils' achievement in relation to their standards on entry to the school is good. In the sixth form standards are average. Students' satisfactory attitudes prevail over good teaching and result in satisfactory progress. The shortage of good advanced textbooks has an impact on the quality of learning. Students' achievement in relation to their standards on entry to the sixth form is satisfactory.

127 Attainment in geography on entry to the school is average. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9, based on procedures that produce reliable results, show standards to be above the national average for boys. The achievement and progress of pupils are, therefore, good. The quality of teaching and learning observed was good or better in 60 per cent of lessons in Years 7 to 9 and was never less than satisfactory. Overall it was good.

128 Teachers know their subject well and are competent in teaching literacy and numeracy. As a result all pupils in Years 7 to 9 gradually extend their use of technical language. They increase their geographical knowledge, skills and understanding of places, patterns and processes. Higher-attaining pupils made rapid progress in a lesson on Egypt where they considered the river Nile as "a gift from God." The lesson was taught with vivacity and pace and the teacher skilfully involved all pupils and reinforced their class-work with very good homework. In another lesson on the same topic lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, used a different and carefully produced worksheet to enable them to make good progress. Similar pupils made less progress when learning about the pattern of farming in the British Isles. No support was available and the teacher had to spend too much time managing the disruptive behaviour of some pupils. Generally the control of pupils, the setting of purposeful homework and the marking of pupils' work are consistently good features of the teaching. Higher-attaining pupils complete detailed work on the processes of erosion and deposition in river channels but they do not transfer this knowledge when explaining the physical features of river valleys. Where teaching is satisfactory, it, nonetheless, does not challenge pupils sufficiently and they are restricted to basic textbook exercises. For example, they filled in a simple table rather than write a detailed account of the relationship between the natural environment and land use and settlement in southern Italy. In work on the ecosystem of a tropical rainforest pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the culture of the indigenous people. They consider the moral issues of deforestation through its impact on the greenhouse effect and global warming. Ordnance survey map-reading skills are developed in Year 7 but not used extensively in Years 8 and 9.

129 Pupils begin the GCSE course in Year 10 with above average attainment in geography. At the end of Year 11 standards are well above average for boys. The achievement and progress of pupils are, therefore, good. The quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons varied from satisfactory to very good. Overall it is good.

130 Pupils continue to increase their knowledge and understanding of human and physical geography. Very good teaching uses good quality resources and enables pupils to apply their understanding of tourism to its development in an alpine valley. They consider the benefits and problems this causes for people and the environment. In pairs they prepare and deliver speeches on how this development can be sustained. Homework extends their understanding when they are challenged to consider the case that tourist development in Benidorm cannot be sustainable. Higher-attaining pupils write, at length, detailed accounts on the cause and effect of natural hazards. Lower-attaining pupils write in less detail particularly when explaining the cause. Pupils use a wide variety of graphs to analyse data on land use and pedestrian density in Ormskirk, which they collect in fieldwork. They make valid conclusions and are aware of the limitations of their findings. Some of this work is word-processed and uses spreadsheets. However, the use of ICT in geography to enhance pupils' learning is insufficient to meet requirements.

131 The GCSE examination results have improved considerably since the previous inspection and in 2000 were well above the national average for boys. The proportion of boys gaining the highest A* and A grades was above average and 160 were entered for the examination out of 171 on the course. Of this very high entry all obtained a pass grade: a commendable achievement. There was a significant improvement of the performance of boys with average attainment.

132 The A-level results have improved since the previous inspection and in 2000 were very close to the national average. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. However, the quality of learning is satisfactory because of the reluctance of some students to take advice of marking and complacency towards revision.

133 Skilful questioning developed students' understanding of urban structure in relation to the segregation of social groups and population movement. A good knowledge of case studies and the use of maps led to a clear exposition. A framework was constructed on the board from which the students made their own detailed notes. A collection of written work demonstrated carelessness with description and weak explanations. Individual fieldwork investigations illustrate a knowledge and understanding of patterns and processes in physical and human geography and uses statistical techniques to analyse data.

134 The department is well organised and led. Teaching and learning have improved since the time of the previous inspection. However, monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in lessons to extend the very best practice does not happen regularly. A detailed plan of how to improve teaching and standards is not fully in place. Results are reviewed but targets are not set.

HISTORY

135 Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because the overall quality of teaching is good and the majority of pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards on entry to the school at the start of Year 7 are good. The extensive range of well-selected resources which are used to support textbooks, also cause the quality of learning in history to be good. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school

136 Basic historical skills are well established in Year 7. Time-lines help pupils to place the periods and events, which they study, in a chronological framework. This was very effectively reinforced in a lesson in Year 7 where the teacher skilfully encouraged pupils to use family relationships in the Plantagenet dynasty to precisely locate the reign of King John in the Middle Ages. Pupils can explain the causes and results of political, religious, economic and social change. Knowledge is often detailed and by Year 9 is applied well, for example, in writing "contemporary" letters expressing opinions about the slave trade. Pupils in Year 7 understand the difference between primary and secondary sources of information and can select information appropriately when describing events such as the Battle of Hastings. Most pupils are confident in using a wide range of sources of information, which go beyond those found in their textbooks. Teachers make good use of source material and worksheets found on education websites, and many pupils use information technology to research information for themselves, both in school and at home. Higher attainers in Year 9 evaluate the reliability of sources of information used for their investigations but seldom assess their comparative usefulness. All history rooms have impressive displays of pupils' work in which they communicate their knowledge, understanding and ideas in a wide variety of forms including extended writing, desk-top publishing, diagrams, graphs, maps and models. The work of Year 7 pupils in creating models of motte and bailey castles is particularly impressive in the meticulous attention to accuracy and detail and is indicative of the interest in the subject inspired by the quality of teaching. By the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment in history is above average, and this represents good achievement

137 The organisation of pupils into groups of broadly similar attainment in Years 7 to 11 means that teachers adapt their lessons to provide the right challenge for each class. This organisation also ensures that lower-attaining pupils are taught in small groups, which means that in addition to the fact that learning resources and activities are well matched to their needs, teachers also spend more time with individual pupils. Consequently, these pupils, including those who have special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well. The liaison between teachers and learning support assistants is effective, which also contributes to the good progress made by the pupils who receive this extra support. In the minority of cases, where teachers rely on a single textbook and on lengthy explanations, there is not the same challenge and pupils' progress, though satisfactory, could be better. The attitudes to learning of the vast majority of pupils are very good. The teaching encourages an interest in the subject and pupils concentrate very well in paired and group discussion, as well as on their written tasks. Concentration only lapses on the few occasions when the challenge is not well matched to pupils' levels of attainment or when the teaching lacks sparkle. Skills of literacy are reinforced by good use of key words and teachers encourage accuracy in spelling. In an excellent lesson in Year 8, pupils gained a detailed accurate knowledge of the life and personality of Charles 1 through enjoyable, interesting, competitive activities, which challenged their listening skills. The teacher kept the pupils on their toes throughout a very interesting narrative, freely interspersed with opportunities for them to both answer and ask questions. They were then well equipped to take part in the evaluative discussion which followed. Homework is regular, and it extends and consolidates learning. Marking is thorough, particularly in the sixth form, and helps pupils and students to improve their work.

138 GCSE results have improved since the previous inspection and, from 1998 have fluctuated from well above average to above average. In 2000 results were above average and pupils' results in history were good in comparison with their other subjects. The inspection evidence indicates that standards by the end of Year 11 are above average. Most pupils make good progress because they are well challenged by the teaching but an analysis of pupils' work indicates that some, though making

satisfactory progress, could be pushed harder. Pupils made good and very good progress in lessons where they worked at pace on a variety of activities which ensured their involvement in both discussion and challenging written tasks. On these occasions the teachers also used their own detailed knowledge of the topics well in sharp questioning, which forced pupils to think for themselves. In a very good lesson on the Cuban Missile Crisis, there was a real buzz of interest as pupils were skilfully led to use their previous knowledge and understanding of the events, in evaluating the options open to President Kennedy.

139 Since 1998, A-level results have been below, but close to average which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. In 2000, students' results in history were better than in their other subjects. Students currently in Year 13 collaborate effectively in group work, confidently presenting the results of their investigations to the rest of the class. Higher attainers write at length using relevant quotations well in support of their cogent arguments. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good and the response of Year 12 students to mock examination questions indicates that they are being well prepared for the new AS level courses.

140 The subject is led effectively and there is a developing culture for improvement based on a good understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses. For example, assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 were unreliable and are now being improved, as are the numbers and quality of learning resources. Issues raised at the previous inspection have been largely tackled successfully although some lessons still lack variety. At the time of the previous inspection the quality of teaching was found to be sound. Now, over sixty per cent of teaching is good or better and the evidence from pupils' work, particularly in classroom display, is also indicative of good teaching. Even better teaching would be encouraged if the current arrangements for planned programmes of observation of lessons were improved. Schemes of work have been revised to take into account recent changes in the National Curriculum for history but do not make sufficient use of local history and there are no means of checking that all key skills receive appropriate coverage. ICT is used well, for example, in teaching American history in the sixth form, but the provision is currently unevenly spread. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to extend their interest in history through extra curricular classes, and trips abroad.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

141 Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average in Years 7 to 11 and are average in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 11 teaching is satisfactory; in the sixth form teaching is good. Pupils' achievement throughout the school in relation to standards at the start of Year 7 is unsatisfactory. In the sixth form, students' achievement in Year 12 in relation to standards at the end of Year 11 is good. Year 13 students' achievement is poor – most students have not followed an ICT course since the end of Year 11. Pupils' and students' attitudes are good.

142 The first external examination results for sixth-form students will be in 2002. There is no GCSE course at the end of Year 11. All Year 10 and 11 pupils follow a Royal Society of Arts examination. The first results will be in 2001. At the end of Year 9 pupils are entered for the Royal Society of Arts CLAIT exam. In 2000 over three-quarters of pupils obtained a pass. The Year 9 National Curriculum teacher assessments for 2000 were well above the national average but are not an accurate reflection of pupils' attainment in ICT.

143 By the end of Year 9, although most pupils can use word-processing to a good standard, their knowledge and skills in the wider aspects of communicating and handling information are narrow. They have a reasonable understanding of spreadsheet construction and use simple formulae when following teacher instructions. Only pupils with a computer at home and a self-developed interest in ICT know the major Internet search engines and use them to locate and research topics of interest. In Years 10 and 11 pupils have average standards in a narrow range of ICT skills, mainly databases, spreadsheets and word-processing. They are unable to work in multi-media. They have not learned of the impact of ICT on methods of working and are largely ignorant of the social, economic, ethical and moral issues surrounding the use of new technologies. Their understanding of the use of ICT to solve problems by building models, constructing procedures and then measuring or controlling the results is well below average except for GNVQ pupils who have average standards in this area.

144 Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall for pupils in Years 7 to 11. One sixth of lessons

seen were unsatisfactory and half were good. The best teaching is enthusiastic and energetic, setting pupils challenging tasks requiring them to work independently and ensuring that they acquire new knowledge and understanding of ICT or learn new skills. This is a feature of GNVQ teaching. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils are set low-level tasks that are too easy for them so that they learn little they do not already know and where they are denied the opportunity to work independently of the teacher. Throughout the teaching good relationships with the pupils ensure that they are unafraid to ask questions or risk making mistakes. In Year 12 teaching is good.

145 There are several reasons why, despite the satisfactory teaching and good attitudes of pupils in Years 7 to 9, standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory. In some bands and subjects there is insufficient teaching time for pupils to cover the National Curriculum for ICT and this statutory requirement is not being met. The time-tabling arrangements whereby groups get two consecutive hours of ICT each week for four weeks each term, inhibits continuity of learning; any absence during these four weeks results in a disproportionate amount of lost learning in relation to the length of absence. The computer network the majority of pupils use in the lower school is unreliable; for example, during the first four-week block of the autumn term 2000 the system was unusable and several classes spent all their ICT lessons doing worksheets. Even when working, the network does not have Internet access. Achievement for pupils with special educational needs is also unsatisfactory for the same reasons even though teachers make good use of their individual education plans, adapting them to include specific ICT targets. High-attaining pupils, such as those in the Alpha and A classes, achieve less well than any other group. The ICT scheme of work is over-reliant on the CLAIT exam that is too easy for them. In Years 10 and 11 achievement overall is unsatisfactory because the majority of Year 11 pupils did little ICT in Year 10 and have not been able to catch up. The greatest underachievement in Years 10 and 11 is again in the higher-attaining groups such as the Alpha and A groups who are capable of GCSE work but are doing a less demanding course which does not cover the requirements of the National Curriculum. Pupils who do the GNVQ Part 1 course make satisfactory progress as the course is well suited to their needs and the teaching of it is good. Year 12 students achieve well due to the good teaching they receive, the appropriate courses they follow and the excellent computer resources they have at their disposal. Most Year 13 students have not followed an ICT course since Year 11 and their achievement since then has been poor.

146 Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils per computer has risen dramatically and is now at the national average. Facilities in the upper school are now excellent. The library is well resourced with the very latest technology. All pupils have access to the library network on a rota basis and it is very well used at break times, lunch times and after school. More teaching time has been provided for Year 10 and 11 pupils and accredited courses have been introduced into the sixth form. There is still inadequate coverage of the National Curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 11.

147 The emphasis now must be on ensuring that the improvements in resources and accommodation have an impact on the learning of all pupils so as to raise their attainment from its current low level. A priority must be to establish a proper staffing structure. The current coordinator is not recognised as a head of department and is not given the non-teaching time to monitor how well pupils are being taught and what standards they are achieving. No one is currently carrying out this monitoring role, which is essential if standards are to rise from below average and pupils' achievements in ICT are to improve from their current unsatisfactory level.

Key Skills: the use of information and communication technology to support learning across the curriculum

148 There are insufficient opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 9 to use their ICT skills in subjects other than ICT. There is insufficient time in some bands for ICT to be taught as a discrete subject. Use of the Internet is rare. From Year 9 onwards there is a greater use of word-processing in presenting work in a number of subjects, including English, modern foreign languages, physical education, geography and history. In music there is good use of ICT in composing and performing. In design and technology pupils make effective use of design software. In geography, pupils and students use spreadsheets in fieldwork data analysis. Much more use is made of the Internet, for example, in art where pupils research the lives of artists and art movements. All pupils and students have their own school e-mail address which modern foreign language pupils use to communicate with pupils in France. The A-level American history course is taught solely through Internet use; homework is e-mailed to

school and the department is building up a comprehensive range of historical web sites.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

149 Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. At age 11 pupils begin French and they achieve well in relation to standards reached by the end of Year 9. Pupils' achievements in relation to standards both at the start of Year 10 and when they enter the sixth form are also good. Pupils' attitudes also cause the quality of pupils' learning in modern languages to be good. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

French

150 When they enter the school pupils begin French and achieve well overall. They develop their listening skills well so that they understand instructions and identify details from tapes. They show good understanding of printed texts and worksheets and the emphasis in teachers' planning on reading short stories develops their reading skills further. They learn basic grammar structures together with a large quantity of vocabulary, which enables them to write sentences and thereby contributes to the development of their literacy skills. Higher attainers express opinions and show some knowledge of tenses but they do not have sufficient opportunities to write freely at any length. Higher attainers speak confidently in sentences whereas average and lower attainers are more hesitant and responses are often brief. In general, pupils need more frequent opportunities to practise their oral work. At the end of Year 9, standards are just above average in French and are higher than those recorded in teachers' statutory assessments, which are too severe.

151 Good teaching and pupils' good attitudes to their language learning ensure that they continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11. At age 16 standards are above average. In the GCSE sets, higher-attaining pupils achieve very well; they develop their spoken and written style by learning to use different tenses and more complex structures. Most pupils in the lower GCSE sets also achieve well, especially when well chosen resources catch their interest and encourage more active involvement. However, a small number of pupils underachieve when the level of work is undemanding or there is a lack of pace which causes them to become restless and lose interest. Standards of work in the GCSE sets are well above average and closely match the high GCSE A*-C grades achieved in recent years.

152 In Year 11, approximately 40 per cent of pupils follow a short course in French leading to the Certificate of Achievement. However, the majority of these pupils achieve higher standards that are consistent with the GCSE Foundation tier. The school has recently recognised to some extent this mismatch between pupils' achievement and accreditation by increasing the number of GCSE sets in Year 10. However, the school needs to consider increasing still further the number of boys taking GCSE. In the lowest set, which includes pupils with special educational needs, pupils generally makes good progress towards the realistic targets set for them, although irregular attendance slows progress for a significant minority.

153 In the sixth form, standards are above average. Students become increasingly confident and proficient in listening to and speaking French to explain and discuss ideas and they extract information from authentic texts such as newspapers, often through use of the Internet. In writing, though students make progress over the two-year course, they experience some difficulty in self-expression and there is a certain lack of attention to accuracy. In 2000, results were lower than in the two previous years; only two out of the five students entered achieved an A-level pass. This is too small an entry to make national comparisons.

Spanish

154 Boys who begin Spanish as a second language in Year 9 make rapid progress in response to very good teaching. Standards reached at the end of Year 9 are broadly average, which represents very good achievement in the limited time. Pupils develop all the skills well, but especially their listening and speaking.

155 Those who opt to continue with Spanish in Year 10 reach standards that are well above average, at the age of 16, which confirm the high GCSE A*-C results in 2000. Pupils speak confidently about their

school and future career and write accounts of their recent work experience, showing good progress in using tenses appropriately.

156 In the sixth form, where only one student in Year 13 is studying Spanish, the standard of work is above average. The student's mature and sustained discussion in fluent Spanish of the life of General Franco gave a clear indication of the depth of his knowledge and of his good progress. Since the previous inspection, A-level numbers have been very small, with broadly average results. There were no entries in 2000.

157 Pupils have good attitudes to language learning. They come ready to learn and behave well. They complete their homework conscientiously, including learning by heart. The pupils have good opportunities to develop their use of ICT, including contact with link-schools abroad. There is good support for the after-school language clubs and annual visits to France which provide opportunities for sixth-form students to take responsibility as junior leaders, all of which contributes well to their cultural and social development.

158 In modern languages, the good rate of pupils' progress is underpinned by consistently good teaching throughout the school. It was good in two thirds of lessons in French and was consistently very good in Spanish. The best lessons had clear objectives, resources were varied, tasks were challenging and pupils learnt at a good pace. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection but could be raised further by sharing existing good practice.

159 Marking and assessment practice in Years 7-9 needs review because pupils are sometimes overpraised for mediocre work, yet levels assigned are very low. Teachers need to gain a more secure understanding of National Curriculum levels so that pupils are informed accurately about how well they are doing and are clear about what they must do to improve.

160 Management is good. Issues raised at the previous inspection have been tackled successfully and changes have been implemented. Monitoring of teaching and learning is firmly established and is leading to the raising of standards. It is a model to which some other subjects might aspire. The most significant improvement has been in GCSE results that have risen steeply each year, culminating in the school's highest ever results in 2000.

MUSIC

161 Standards of work seen in school during the inspection were satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9. They were very good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 9, the standard of teaching varies. While some is excellent, sometimes teachers' expectations of lower-attaining pupils are too high, leading occasionally to unsatisfactory behaviour and progress. Pupils' achievements in relation to their standards at the start of Year 7 are satisfactory. In relation to standards at the start of Year 10 and the sixth form, students' achievements are very good, and their attitudes are excellent. Although the scheme of work in Years 7 to 9 contains too few opportunities for composing, and some topics are insufficiently linked to creative work, pupils make satisfactory progress on the whole. The very high standard of teaching of GCSE and A-level courses enables the students to learn very effectively and they make very good progress through these courses.

162 Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve satisfactorily overall, but they have a very good knowledge of musical theory and literacy. Their keyboard skills develop satisfactorily through a graduated course over three years, but the pace of individual learning is reduced by the need to share instruments. Pupils copy much information from worksheets, for example about different eras in music, but this is not modified for pupils with special educational needs and some pupils do not fully understand what they write. These topics are well exemplified with recorded examples, but there are too few chances for pupils to develop their oracy and critical skills by discussing or writing about the music they hear. Pupils have too few opportunities to compose. Good opportunities for composing are missed, for example in connection with the topic in Year 9 on Indian music

163 Recorded examples of composing in Year 11 indicate above average standards of attainment. Compositions show a very good grasp of harmony and texture. Pupils write in a good variety of styles, including traditional and 12-tone instrumental compositions, and choral pieces, some of which the Boys' Choir performs. Pupils use computers skilfully for composing and performing their compositions. Pupils

begin the GCSE course with varied levels of previous attainment. By Year 11, they have achieved very well. In a practice for the GCSE practical examination, all pupils showed a well-developed sense of style achieved through conscientious practice. Their keen commitment indicated that they are all following a serious hobby rather than a mere academic discipline. Results in the last three years have been very high, with at least 80 per cent of candidates achieving grades A* to C. In 2000, all 14 candidates achieved the higher grades.

164 Very small numbers take A-level and they achieve high grades. Students achieved very well in the lessons observed in Year 13. The students show well-developed analytical skills and use appropriate technical language when describing and comparing the works they are studying. They achieve very well in all aspects of the course.

165 Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Much is good and some excellent, but a small amount is unsatisfactory. All lessons are carefully prepared and teachers have a high level of technical knowledge. When pupils work on keyboards, they receive constructive advice individually on how to improve, which enables all to learn at a good pace. Pupils are individually assessed as they work to avoid wasting time and there is regular testing of all work done. Teachers keep detailed records and track pupils' progress carefully. In an excellent lesson in Year 7, the teacher organised a rhythm competition that involved groups of pupils devising and performing rhythmic sequences on percussion instruments. Each group performed while the others wrote down the rhythm. All pupils conspicuously increased their practical understanding of rhythm, pulse and notation, the pace and depth of learning were excellent, and the lesson was great fun. Occasionally, some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. There is insufficient emphasis on the correct spelling of key words in written work.

166 Individual support and carefully targeted advice are prominent features of the teaching of the GCSE and A-level courses, of which the teaching is very good, and sometimes excellent. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge. Resources are carefully chosen and of a very high standard, often prepared with the use of ICT, in which members of staff are skilled. In an excellent lesson in Year 13, in which the group analysed parts of Stravinsky's 'Firebird Suite', the teacher explained and demonstrated different aspects of the music lucidly. He provided excellent printed information to assist the students and patiently elicited perceptive observations from them, enabling them to make excellent progress and to achieve a very high standard of learning. The musical understanding of the GCSE and A-level students is boosted by regular attendance at orchestral concerts. Teachers make very good use in lessons of these experiences.

167 Leadership and management of the department are very good on a day-to-day basis. Organisation of the academic courses and the extra-curricular provision is excellent. The schemes of work for GCSE and A-level are excellent. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is very informative, but provides too few creative opportunities for pupils. There is too much copying of information and tasks are insufficiently adapted to the needs of lower-attaining pupils. Formal assessment of pupils' achievements in relation to the requirements of the National Curriculum has not been carried out as required at the end of Year 9. Most aspects of the provision for music have developed well since the previous inspection, with the exception of the lower school curriculum.

168 The department has, however, appropriate plans to update the scheme of work soon and to introduce opportunities for using ICT into Years 7 to 9. The head of department monitors the teaching of colleagues regularly, but the split site and the non-specialist accommodation at the upper school limit liaison between teachers and the effective sharing of good practice.

169 There are very good opportunities for pupils to further their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through music. The department provides a good range of instrumental teaching by visiting tutors, and there is a proficient orchestra. However, the outstanding aspect of the school's music is the extra-curricular choral provision. Standards attained by the Boys' Choir are readily comparable with those achieved in most choir schools. There is an intensive schedule of high profile performances throughout the year. These include services, broadcast performances and concerts. The school choir is featured in the Guinness Book of Records for singing in every Anglican cathedral in the country. There is an annual tour abroad, and, in 1999, the choir had the privilege of performing for His Holiness the Pope at a private audience.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

170 Standards of work seen during the inspection are average overall with above average standards at the end of Year 9. These are achieved because the teaching is satisfactory overall with a higher proportion of good teaching found in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' achievement in relation to standards at the start of Year 7 is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 to 11. The very good range of extra-curricular activities, that involves high numbers of pupils, helps to raise standards. Pupils achieve success at district, county and sometimes national level in football, cricket, swimming, athletics, squash and cross-country running. Pupils' positive attitudes towards physical education contribute to the quality of their learning in Years 7 to 9 and for those taking part regularly in Years 10 and 11. However many older pupils opt out of physical education and do not bring kit. Consequently these pupils learn very little and this affects the standards achieved overall.

171 The 1999 GCSE results were well above average. In 2000 they dropped to below the national average and below the average for boys owing to the difference in the range of prior attainment of the boys between the two years. In 2000 the school's arrangements for choosing GCSE courses of study did not enable pupils from Anselm and Ambrose classes, average and higher attaining pupils, to opt for the GCSE physical education exam. Since then pupils from all groups can opt to take the exam.

172 By the age of fourteen and sixteen boys demonstrate high standards in football. They show good control and accuracy in passing both in practice and in games. They have good tactical awareness and they communicate well within their teams to organise advanced strategies. Well-organised teaching and teachers who are highly qualified and experienced in football coaching help to attain these levels.

173 Middle and lower-attaining pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, make good progress, and achieve well in basketball and swimming throughout Years 7 to 9. The teaching groups are small and the teachers know the pupils' needs well. Consequently teachers can give a great deal of guidance to match individual needs.

174 Across all years pupils can evaluate performance in response to teachers' questions but they are less confident in talking to each other about performance because opportunities to do so are infrequent. Pupils know how to warm up and cool down but do not often take responsibility for this part of the lesson. They have a limited understanding of how exercise contributes to fitness and older pupils have not worked on developing their own exercise programmes. A small number of boys in Years 10 to 13 become confident in officiating and coaching, for example in squash and football, but opportunities for pupils to learn and practise these activities are limited.

175 Pupils achieve high standards in GCSE practical work. Their theory work is around average. Pupils' written work reflects a satisfactory level of understanding but their ability to retain knowledge is less secure. Homework is given regularly and is well matched to pupils' learning needs. However pupils need to be tested more frequently, expected to recall what they have learnt and apply it to practical work in order to improve understanding and establish good learning habits.

176 The quality of teaching and pupils' learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is good or better in around 75 per cent of the lessons in Years 7 to 9 and around 60 per cent in Years 10 to 11. Teaching is very good in 14 per cent of lessons. There was one unsatisfactory lesson observed during the inspection.

177 Teachers' secure knowledge of the activities they teach ensures that pupils are suitably challenged to improve their skills and understanding. For example in a Year 8 football lesson the boys were challenged to use advanced turning skills appropriately in a game. Teachers ensure that pupils physically work hard and lessons move at good pace. Teachers maintain high standards of discipline and the boys behave well, concentrate and work hard and want to improve. Teachers use demonstrations and questioning well, for example in squash lessons, to improve pupils understanding. When teachers allow pupils to talk to each other about their performance, as seen in a Year 7 swimming lesson, pupils respond positively and improve their techniques.

178 The teaching of GCSE theory has some good features. Pupils are encouraged to structure their arguments well when discussing social issues in sport. Some teachers ensure that pupils understand and can spell key words by compiling glossaries of terms relevant to each section. Some teachers insist

that pupils write in their own words to ensure understanding. Marked work clearly indicates what has been achieved and what needs to be done to improve. However, these features are not consistent across the department.

179 When boys are unable to take a physically active part in lessons there are not enough activities planned to ensure that they are learning. Activities to promote pupils' understanding of exercise, health and fitness occur infrequently. In the one unsatisfactory lesson the focus on what was to be learnt was unclear. The activities lacked depth and challenge and consequently little new was learnt.

180 Effective management has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and standards in Years 7 to 9 since the previous inspection. Lessons are longer and the breadth of learning opportunities has improved. GCSE has been successfully introduced and A-level is planned for the next academic year. High standards in the extra-curricular programme have been maintained. However there are still a significant number of boys in Years 10 and 11 who do not take part in lessons regularly and the learning opportunities in these years do not always reflect the expectations of the National Curriculum. The overall ethos of the school is not mirrored in the attitudes of non-participating boys to work in physical education; teachers are insufficiently assertive in tackling this issue. Although most outstanding health and safety concerns have been put right a full risk assessment of activities and working spaces has not been carried out. Provision for sixth-form students is satisfactory. The boys have a choice of activities similar to that found in Year 11. Girls have a programme of activities designed by themselves and staff to promote their personal, social, and health education.

BUSINESS STUDIES

181 Standards of work seen in business studies are above average. Students' achievement is very good in relation to their attainment at the beginning of the course. This is mainly due to very good teaching and effective support from the coordinator for business studies and the work of the teachers. They know the students well and have a concern that they achieve the highest possible standards. Students' attitudes and eagerness to learn are contributory factors to their achievement. The good relationships they enjoy with their teachers ensures that they are receptive to challenge and willing to apply their knowledge and understanding in "real world" situations.

182 Students in Year 12 are studying for the new advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) – in Year 13 titled the GNVQ advanced. The school also offers an intermediate GNVQ course in business, representing together a comprehensive range of courses. In 2000, all students gained passes in the intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses: at intermediate level 21 per cent of pupils obtained distinction and 64 per cent merit awards; at advanced level 30 per cent obtained distinction and 50 per cent merit awards. These good results are the result of the very positive attitudes of the students and the energetic and committed teaching based on a good knowledge of the subject and the course requirements.

183 Students achieve at an effective rate and they develop a good understanding of the main principles of the subject. They understand the nature of competitive business and the importance of marketing and benefit from visiting speakers that allow them to compare their growing theoretical knowledge with actual business practice. A highlight of this practical approach is the study visit to Antwerp, looking at business practices at an established brewery.

184 The quality of teaching is always good and usually very good. Teachers are well versed in the content of the course and their confident teaching brings matching confidence in students' learning, especially in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of principles of business. Students are less assured at analysing marketing data. Discussions in lessons are effective and most students contribute comfortably. The new AVCE course introduced in Year 12 has a good take-up and staff and students are becoming familiar with the demands of it. Teachers' planning is thorough and focused on the demands of the course and the learning attributes of the students. ICT is used effectively to support learning on this and the other business courses in the sixth form.

CLASSICS

185 Standards of work seen during the inspection in Latin and Greek are above average throughout

the school. However, because of internal school examinations, it was not possible to observe lessons for Years 10 and 12. For these two years only a very limited amount of written work was available for inspection and was insufficient to make any valid judgement on standards attained. It is a feature of the teaching of the subject for most work to be undertaken orally rather than in writing.

186 The above-average standards seen in the school are achieved because the teaching is for the most part good, pupils are well motivated, and the teachers provide the pupils with copious revision materials, notes and model translations. As a consequence pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

187 Latin is taught only to higher-attaining pupils, with Greek being available to only the highest-attaining pupils. All of these pupils study Latin in Year 7, and in Year 8 a set of 10 to 20 pupils who show most aptitude and interest study Greek also within the the time allocated for Latin. In Years 9,10 and 11 only the highest-attaining pupils continue to study Latin or the combination of Latin and Greek. However, arrangements are made for lunchtime sessions in Latin for those pupils who, at the end of Year 8, still wish to continue with it even though it is not available to them within the timetable.

188 The classical subjects are entirely new to all pupils who enter the school in Year 7. By the end of Year 9 pupils achieve good skills in translation work and comprehension as they are given a good grounding in the structure of the languages with their constantly changing word endings to alter meanings. They also make significant progress in mastering the declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs and in developing the skill of making informed guesses for translation from the context of a passage.

189 By the end of Year 11 pupils tackle the translation of more complex texts and develop good skills in sentence and clause analysis to enable them to approach this translation work systematically. This is reflected in the results they achieve in GCSE examinations. In each of the last three years pupils have achieved a higher percentage of A* to C grades than pupils at other similar schools. In the sixth form, although on the basis of only limited lesson observation and work scrutiny, it can be seen that students have developed skills in literary appreciation and textual analysis of both prose and verse, and that they achieve above average standards. However, the number of pupils studying Latin and Greek in the sixth form is too small to make a valid comparison with other schools

190 Pupils benefit from being taught by teachers with an excellent knowledge of their subjects, who plan their lessons well and establish good relationships. Of the lessons seen during the inspection 70 per cent were good and 30 per cent were satisfactory. Overall, teachers have high expectations of their pupils, who respond with interest, very good behaviour, and high levels of concentration. The approach to most lessons is through direct teaching combined with the use of challenging questions to pupils to maintain their motivation and interest, and to draw from them complete answers. There are few opportunities for independent learning by the pupils. Resources for learning are adequate, but many books are in poor condition and in need of replacement. Much of the accommodation is cramped and restricts flexible approaches to teaching and learning.

191 Contributions to the pupils' social, moral and cultural development arise naturally from their learning of the civilisations, cultures, religion, literature and social life in ancient Greece and Rome. This is enhanced by annual visits alternately to Greece and Italy. The study of Latin and Greek naturally contributes to raising pupils' skills in literacy, but the only conscious contribution to its development is the display of key words in classrooms for pupils to research. Pupils' skills in numeracy and ICT are not developed within classics.

192 The department is well led, and departmental documentation is detailed, thorough and comprehensive. Since the time of the previous inspection monitoring of teaching within the department has been introduced together with careful recording and tracking of pupil progress. These are very beneficial improvements.