

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHCROFT HIGH SCHOOL

Luton

LEA area: Luton

Unique reference number: 109707

Headteacher: Mr A R M Ellis

Lead inspector: Dr V Johnston

Dates of inspection: 29th September - 3rd October 2003

Inspection number: 258553

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 student:	11 to 16
Gender of student:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1114
School address:	Crawley Green Road Luton Bedfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	12 th – 16 th January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ashcroft High School is a mixed comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. At the time of the inspection it had 1114 students, which is bigger than most secondary schools. The school is over-subscribed. It serves a residential area to the east of Luton, drawing the majority of students from five neighbouring primary schools. The students come from a wide variety of social backgrounds, which overall are less advantaged than in schools nationally. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals (21%) is above the national average for secondary schools. A comparatively high proportion of students, about a fifth, come from families of minority ethnic origin, mainly from the Indian sub-continent and from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, but no one group predominates. A tenth of the students speak another language in addition to English, but only a very few are not fluent in English.

The overall attainment of students on entry to Year 7 has been below average, though it has been rising and is now close to the national average. The proportion of students who have been identified as having special educational needs is above the national average. Twenty-two students have a statement of special educational need, relating to social, emotional and behavioural problems or moderate learning difficulties. More students than in most schools join the school after the start of Year 7 or leave before the end of Year 11. The turnover of teaching staff has been very high, at 80 per cent in the last two years.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
8402	V Johnston	Lead inspector	English English as a second language
19653	E Dickson	Lay inspector	
27719	P Metcalf	Team inspector	
18178	I Matthews	Team inspector	Mathematics
23242	M Newman	Team inspector	Science
32590	R Fenwick	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology
24142	J Woodhouse	Team inspector	Geography
33002	S Argyle	Team inspector	Art and design Citizenship
27226	R Cribb	Team inspector	History Physical education Business studies
32208	D Aitken	Team inspector	Languages
31372	B Hardwick	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs
14828	K Storry	Team inspector	Music

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is poor. Standards are lower than they should be and students are underachieving as a result of weaknesses in teaching and learning, students' attitudes and their behaviour, and the leadership and management of the school. High staff turnover and the significant number of inexperienced teachers have contributed to the school's difficulties. The school provides poor value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- Students are underachieving and so the standard of their work in many subjects is lower than it should be. Weaknesses in students' skills in literacy are holding back their learning.
- Teaching and learning were good or better in about a third of the lessons observed. However, teaching and learning are poor overall, largely because of teachers' low expectations and difficulties in managing the poor behaviour that disrupts some lessons.
- Students' personal development and attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory.
- Weaknesses in leadership and management are holding back the school's improvement.
- Students are learning well in business studies, information and communication technology (ICT), and physical education.
- The 'golden curriculum' offers a good, individually-tailored programme for students who need extra support.

The school has shown too little improvement since the last inspection, which was in January 1998, as it was very slow to respond to the main findings of the inspection. Teaching has not improved, the use of assessment is still weak, and suitable homework is not yet set regularly. Management weaknesses remain, and students' spiritual development is not provided for well enough. However, the school's weaknesses have been tackled more purposefully recently.

In accordance with section 13(7) of the Schools Inspections Act 1996 I am of the opinion, and HMCI agrees, that special measures are required in relation to this school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
	B	C	D	C

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

The overall attainment of students on entry to Year 7 is below average, although rising and now closer to the national average than in previous years. However, **students' achievement is unsatisfactory**, overall and in all year groups, and they are falling further behind students nationally. Students do least well in Years 8, 10 and 11. The standards attained in lessons and shown by students' previous work are below average throughout Years 7 to 11. Students do best in business studies, information and communication technology and physical education. They do least well in English, mathematics, science, art and design, citizenship, design and technology, history, music and religious education.

At the end of Year 9, test results in English, mathematics and science were below the national average in 2003. The results were average compared to schools in which Year 9 students had gained similar results in the 2000 Year 6 tests. The school did not meet its targets for Year 9 results in 2002, nor in 2003. The trend in results is similar to that nationally.

At the end of Year 11, results were below the national average in 2002, with a trend of improvement that was similar to the national trend. The results fell in 2003, especially for higher-attaining students. In comparison with their performance in other subjects, students did better in science and French and least well in English, art and design, and history. The school did not meet its target for GCSE results in 2002 or 2003.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are unsatisfactory overall as the school does too little to promote their personal development. Students' attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory, and their behaviour is poor overall. Attendance is lower than the national average, and unauthorised absence is higher than average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is poor. Teaching is poor overall.

Where teaching was good, the tasks were demanding and the pace of the lesson kept everyone working well. However, in other lessons, unchallenging or inappropriate work meant that the students were bored and inattentive. Teachers did not deal with students' inappropriate behaviour effectively, which further slowed the learning of the rest of the class. Homework is infrequently set or is undemanding, and marking is not informative enough.

The curriculum is unsatisfactory. Too little time is allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 and to citizenship in all years. Too little attention is paid to developing students' skills in language and literacy across the school, and ICT in some subjects. These weaknesses have affected students' achievement. However, the 'golden curriculum' provides well for students with special educational needs. The school provides satisfactory care for its students. Learning mentors provide valuable help for students who have a range of problems, and the students' introduction and transition to Year 7 is good. The school has done too little to involve parents in its work, and reports provide inadequate information about students' progress. The school has good relationships with local colleges, which aids the transition to further education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are poor. The headteacher has led and managed the school satisfactorily, with the beginnings of success in improving several subject areas. Significant weaknesses in the senior management team and among others with management responsibilities have meant that many of the recently-introduced policies have been implemented inconsistently, and so far have had limited impact on improving the school.

The governing body is strongly committed to the school but has not done enough to challenge it on its key weaknesses and to monitor its improvement on the issues raised by the last inspection. Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for teaching religious education are not met. These weaknesses mean that the work of the governing body is unsatisfactory.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents feel that many aspects of the school need improvement, including teachers' expectations of their children, behaviour, reports, homework and the school's leadership and management. They are happy with the arrangements for transferring from primary school to Year 7. Students share the concerns about behaviour, and say that this affects their learning. The inspection team agrees with parents and students.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Raise the quality of teaching, so that students' learning and achievement are improved and standards are raised.
- Manage students' behaviour consistently and effectively, in lessons and around the school.
- Ensure that those in leadership and management positions carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

and, to meet statutory requirements

- Provide a daily act of collective worship.
- Give religious education enough time to cover the local Agreed Syllabus.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Students' achievement is **unsatisfactory**, in the school as a whole and in all year groups. Students do least well in Years 8, 10 and 11. The standards students attain in tests and examinations, lessons and shown by their previous work are below average. Students do best in business studies, information and communication technology and physical education. They do least well in English, mathematics, science, art and design, citizenship, design and technology, history, music and religious education.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Year 9 test results were below the national average in 2003.
- Students achieved less well than they were expected to in the Year 9 tests and in GCSE in 2002 and in 2003.
- GCSE results were below the national average in 2002, and fell in 2003.
- Literacy difficulties act as a barrier to many students' learning, in English and other subjects.
- Students do well in physical education and ICT as a taught subject.

Commentary

1. The Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science were below the national average in 2003. The results were average compared to schools in which Year 9 students had gained similar results in the 2000 Year 6 tests. The school did not meet its targets for Year 9 results in 2003, nor in 2002. Voluntary 'booster' classes were held to help students gain Level 6, which raised these results closer to the national figure in 2003.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.9 (31.9)	33.3 (33.3)
mathematics	33.8 (32.8)	35.3 (34.7)
science	31.5 (30.5)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 213 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. GCSE results were below the national average in 2002. The trend over the last five years was broadly in line with the national trend, although the gap between the school and the national results increased during the last three years. The results fell in 2003, particularly in the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C. In comparison with their performance in other subjects, students did best in science and French and least well in English, art and design, and history. The school did not meet its target for GCSE results in 2002, nor in 2003.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of student gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	39 (33)	50 (48)
Percentage of student gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	88 (89)	91 (91)
Percentage of student gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (93)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	30.9 (n/a)	n/a (n/a)

There were 224 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. The students' attainment on entry, as measured by their Year 6 test results, has been below average, although rising in recent years. The evidence from lessons observed during the inspection and in the sample of students' previously-completed work showed that many have not made sufficient progress over time and so are falling further behind. In particular, although students often have sound factual knowledge which they state confidently orally, weaknesses in reading and writing lower the overall standard of their work. This partly explains the GCSE results being lower than the school expected in 2003.

4. Students' achievement is unsatisfactory largely because of weaknesses in teaching. Unchallenging work has been set in many subjects, and teachers' expectations have been too low. Poor behaviour in lessons and the high turnover of teaching staff have also contributed to students' underachievement. These weaknesses most affect the achievement of students in Years 8, 10 and 11, which was poor in the lessons observed. Standards are well below expectations because of the weaknesses in teaching in English, science, art and design and citizenship as well as design and technology in Years 10 and 11. Music in Years 7 to 9 and religious education in Years 10 and 11 have been given insufficient teaching time, lowering the standards students have attained and their achievement in these subjects.

5. Students achieve well in several subjects. These are ICT and physical education in Years 7 to 9, and GCSE work in business education, ICT and physical education. The key difference in these subjects is that the quality of teaching is good, which leads to students having positive attitudes and learning well.

6. The achievement of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory overall, because teachers make too little provision for their needs in subject lessons. However, when given special help, these students sometimes achieve well. For example, the reading recovery programme has enabled some students to make rapid gains in their reading skills. The small number of students who follow the 'golden curriculum' make good gains in relation to the targets in their individual education plans.

7. The achievement of students who are at an early stage of learning English is unsatisfactory. Although the students have done their best, they have not had the right sort of help from class teachers and so have struggled to cope with their lessons because of language difficulties.

8. The achievement of students who are gifted and talented is also unsatisfactory. Although the school provides a well-organised additional programme, including master classes and summer schools, the work set within lessons lacks challenge.

Student' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes are **unsatisfactory** and their behaviour is **poor**. Attendance is unsatisfactory as it is lower than the national average, with more unauthorised absence than in most schools. The development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Where the teaching is good or very good, students are keen and committed learners.
- Many students respond to unstimulating teaching by being reluctant to work properly in lessons.
- Misbehaviour disrupts lessons, and standards of behaviour around school are poor.
- Irregular attendance and lack of punctuality to lessons hold back students' learning.
- The school pays too little attention to students' personal development.

Commentary

9. In several lessons seen during the inspection, the students were keen to learn and tried very hard to do well. They responded with enthusiasm to demanding work, as in the drama lessons observed. Consistently good attitudes were seen in business studies, ICT and physical education lessons. Here, students complied willingly with the teacher's instructions and got on with their work

without fuss. In most lessons, students are willing to work if the teacher manages the class firmly. They are generally willing to co-operate with each other and to get on independently if suitable work is set and they are given the right support.

10. However, a significant number of students show little interest in what the school offers. They are unmotivated in lessons, and are slow to settle to their work. Some quickly resort to chatter, ignore instructions and waste time at the first opportunity. These negative attitudes were seen in classes through the school, and most often in Year 8. Some older students are also indifferent or hostile to learning. They are easily distracted, unenthusiastic and make little effort in lessons. Their negative attitudes are closely linked to the lack of challenge in these lessons, and teachers' low expectations of their attitudes and effort.

11. The behaviour of many students in lessons is satisfactory, but a number are discourteous, loud and unruly. During some lessons, the teacher ignored poor behaviour or was unable to manage the inappropriate behaviour of some students. Often the students disregarded the teacher's requests for attention, shouted out answers, and talked while the teacher was talking to the class. In some cases students were defiant, and a minority were rude and confrontational. This disrupted their own learning and that of others, as parents said.

12. The behaviour of some students around the school is poor. Staff work hard to contain this behaviour, and discipline is not breaking down. Some students move around the school buildings with a lack of consideration for others, resulting in pushing and jostling in the narrow corridors and on the stairs. Students say that some bullying occurs, and that it is nearly always dealt with effectively when reported. The findings of the inspection confirm many of the concerns about behaviour expressed by parents and students.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of student

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of student on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	820	116	3
White – Irish	9	4	0
White – any other White background	20	3	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	35	7	0
Mixed – White and Black African	7	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	25	12	1
Asian or Asian British – Indian	32	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	29	5	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	47	5	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	5	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	32	5	0
Black or Black British – African	25	2	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	7	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	11	0	0

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

13. The rate of fixed-term exclusions in the last school year was high, but inspectors found no evidence that exclusion had been used as an inappropriate sanction. The rate of exclusions is falling, due in part to the school's provision of work-related education for students in Years 10 and 11 who might otherwise become disaffected. The attitudes to learning, behaviour and attendance of these students improve significantly when they embark on vocational education, which they perceive to be more relevant for their needs.

14. New discipline strategies have been introduced, including an inclusion unit, for students who might otherwise face exclusion from school. In the unit, these students work under close supervision until they are ready to return to lessons. The unit is still in its infancy but the groups of students who were interviewed felt that this approach to discipline would have a positive effect on the overall standards of behaviour.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	10.0	School data	1.5
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

15. The attendance rate is lower than the national average, and the rate of unauthorised absence is higher than average. Punctuality is unsatisfactory. A significant minority of students are late for school and for lessons following morning break and lunchtime. Many students are unhurried when moving to class, slowing the start of lessons and thereby affecting the learning of everyone.

16. Procedures for monitoring students' attendance are satisfactory as a number of improvements have been introduced recently. An electronic registration system is used effectively to record students' attendance each morning and afternoon.

17. Students with special educational needs are generally well integrated into the life of the school. Although a small number behave poorly, the majority of students with special educational needs co-operate with the staff and respond well to teaching that meets their needs.

18. Students who speak English as an additional language are responsible and sensible, and do their best to fit into school life. However, their knowledge of other languages and cultures is not explicitly valued by teachers and the school does too little to promote good relationships between people from different backgrounds.

19. The school's provision for students' spiritual development was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection and remains so. Some teachers have identified ways in which their subject can contribute to students' spiritual development, but the implementation of policies and plans is inconsistent and opportunities to explore spiritual issues are missed. Occasionally, good provision is made. For example, in an assembly, students listened attentively to an account of experiences in working with children with serious and life-threatening illnesses. The students were clearly moved and this prepared them very well for a charity day, when students collected a significant amount of money for a children's hospital.

20. The provision for students' moral development is unsatisfactory. Staff implement the school's code of conduct inconsistently. Although some teachers give a good lead in encouraging students to make positive relationships and show respect for others, other staff do too little to counter students' negative attitudes. More senior staff do not give enough support to new and inexperienced teachers when they are having difficulties in dealing with poor behaviour in lessons.

21. The provision for students' social development is unsatisfactory, despite some examples of good group work in which students collaborate well in their tasks and enjoy taking responsibility. Some students assist in the library at break and lunchtime, and older students act as prefects. However, too many students lack respect for each other and for authority, and are unconcerned that their behaviour affects others' learning.

22. The provision for students' cultural development is unsatisfactory. The school does not do enough to raise students' awareness of their own and others' backgrounds. In particular, staff miss opportunities to celebrate the rich cultures and range of languages evident amongst the students. Although some good extra-curricular activities are available, the expressive arts in particular make too little contribution to students' cultural attainment and progress.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **poor**. Teaching is poor overall. The curriculum is **unsatisfactory**. However, the care provided for its students by the school is **satisfactory**.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching in the school is poor, as is learning. The use of assessment information is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good or very good teaching was characterised by high expectations of students' work, behaviour and effort.
- The work in lessons is often unchallenging, and work of low quality is accepted too readily.
- Teachers are often ineffective in managing students' behaviour in lessons.
- Teachers take too little account of the range of students' needs.
- Teachers do too little to help students to develop their skills in language, literacy and ICT.
- Teachers and students make too little use of assessment information, to help them improve future work.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 117 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0 (0%)	12 (10%)	32 (28%)	48 (41%)	20 (17%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

23. Teaching and learning are poor overall because of the high proportion of lessons in which they were not satisfactory – one fifth of those observed during the inspection. This proportion is similar to that reported by the last inspection. Weak teaching was seen in all year groups, but most often in Year 8. Unsatisfactory and poor teaching were observed among experienced staff as well as those who are new to the school.

24. Good or very good teaching and learning were observed in over one-third of the lessons, from classes in all year groups. Teaching is most successful in ICT and physical education in Years 7 to 11, in business studies in Years 10 and 11, and in religious education in Years 7 to 9. It is currently very good in drama. In these lessons, teachers had good subject knowledge which helped them to develop students' knowledge, skills and understanding well. Good starter activities quickly involved students in the lesson. Teachers explained the work well, and asked questions which engaged and enthused the class. They had high expectations of students' behaviour and enforced them consistently but sensitively. Relationships with students were positive and supportive. The pace of

the work was good, with a variety of challenging activities that the students enjoyed and tried hard to complete successfully. Homework was used well to extend and develop the work of the lesson.

25. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in English, science, art and design and citizenship. They are unsatisfactory in music in Years 7 to 9 and in design and technology, and religious education in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' expectations of the quantity and quality of students' work are often too low. When the work set is too easy, students become bored, make little effort and then become disruptive. When this poor behaviour is badly managed, as happened in several lessons observed, the learning of everyone in the class is affected. Teachers often do too little to adapt the work to meet the range of needs within the class, with the result that higher-attaining students under-perform and those with special educational needs are not given enough help. Homework is rarely set or else relies too heavily on "finishing off" classwork, and so does not reinforce and extend what is learned in lessons.

26. In general, teachers do not take students needs into account sufficiently, and adapt the work appropriately so that it challenges everyone. This contributes to students' underachievement. The teaching of students who are gifted and talented and of those with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Class teachers make too little use of assessment information, and so do not adapt the tasks and resources to meet students' needs. The guidance in the individual education programmes of the special educational needs students is not followed well enough. However, the 'golden curriculum' is taught well, and, when they are present, support staff give skilled help in subject lessons.

27. The provision for students who speak English as an additional language is unsatisfactory. A few teachers consider how to meet the needs of these students, notably in design and technology, but elsewhere this is unusual. Teachers do too little to check on how well the students are doing, and do not take their needs into consideration sufficiently when planning lessons and preparing resources.

28. The provision for students to develop their language and literacy skills is unsatisfactory. Successful practice was seen in ICT, where teachers have a good focus on developing students' skills in speaking and listening, and on broadening their vocabulary. In many other subjects, teachers give students too few opportunities for independent writing such as that required for GCSE coursework, and do too little to teach the literacy skills needed to read and write confidently within their subjects. This contributes to students not achieving well enough.

29. Although there is no whole-school planning for the development of numeracy across the curriculum, students' overall competence is satisfactory as teachers give suitable help when it is needed in subjects such as science, design and technology, and geography.

30. The development of students' skills in using ICT in other subjects is unsatisfactory. Good practice was seen in science, design and technology, and physical education. However, other subjects including English, humanities and modern foreign languages have given students too few opportunities for work using ICT.

31. Improving the use of assessment information to promote students' progress was identified as a key issue by the last inspection. It remains a weakness. Most teachers make too little use of the assessment data provided by senior managers, and are not tracking students' learning over time well enough. This means that under-performance is not identified and dealt with soon enough. However, assessment is good in business studies, design and technology, and ICT. For example, in business studies, students are given targets and clear and helpful guidance on how they may be achieved.

32. Students' work is marked, but rarely in line with school policy. Students are given too little guidance on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. In the good marking, such as in business studies, each piece of work is marked against clear criteria, with reasons for the grades provided, but such marking is not the usual practice.

33. To some extent, the weaknesses in teaching and learning result from the school having been unable to recruit and retain suitably-qualified, experienced teachers. For example, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are inaccurate in several subjects, due to the inexperience of staff.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **unsatisfactory** as some subjects have had too little time or focus, and the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. The school actively promotes participation in sports.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Too little time is allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 to teach the local Agreed Syllabus, and insufficient time is allocated to citizenship in all years.
- Too little attention is paid to developing students' skills in language and literacy and in ICT across the school.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, and form tutor time is often wasted.
- The 'golden curriculum' offers a good individually-tailored programme for students with specific learning, social, behavioural and emotional needs.
- Good links with local colleges help to prepare students for the next stage in their education.
- Good provision for individual needs is made in a few areas, through extra-curricular activities.

Commentary

34. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship, personal and social education, and religious education are allocated only one lesson a week, with the subjects being taught in rotation. These subjects have insufficient time, and the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education cannot be covered in full. The lack of time contributes to students not having made enough progress in these subjects, and to standards being lower than they should be. Form tutors, who teach citizenship and personal and social education, are non-specialists in these areas and this also contributes to students' unsatisfactory achievement in citizenship.

35. Too little attention is paid to developing students' skills in language, literacy and ICT in all year groups. These skills are not planned for consistently, and teachers miss opportunities to extend students' knowledge and experience. Students who are at an early stage of learning English are given some individual assistance with basic vocabulary and grammar, which is helpful. However, these sessions are not linked to the work in their other lessons, limiting their effectiveness. Curriculum planning in subjects does not consider these students' needs sufficiently.

36. The school does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship as the 'thought for the day' is often missed or forgotten in the form tutor time when there is no assembly.

37. The school has developed what it calls the 'golden curriculum', which is designed to meet the needs of students with learning, social, behaviour and emotional needs. This supports these students well because the work is matched to their individual needs and an interesting variety of activities is available. The result has been that these students now attend school more regularly and are achieving well.

38. The school has developed good links with the local colleges, and prepares students well for the next stage in their education. The work-related programme is an important aspect of students' education and the range of vocational subjects on offer has recently been improved by the introduction of manufacturing.

39. Extra-curricular activities are satisfactory, with a strength in the provision for sports. There are many inter-school matches, and the school recently received a Sports Community Award for promoting sporting links between secondary and partner schools. The school is well represented at County level. An annual art trip to Europe provides a valuable opportunity for broadening students' experience. Year 7 students can attend a homework club after school, which helps them to keep up-to-date with their work. The school has made an effort to arrange activities at times when most students can attend, to improve take-up. The music department has recently revived a choir, an ensemble and a guitar club. However, visits to France and Germany have had to be cancelled because of a low response.

40. Although the school has a high staff turnover, the inspection found that the school currently has sufficient teachers to cover the demands of the curriculum. However, too few learning support assistants are available to help in lessons. Accommodation is satisfactory. The new block makes a very good improvement to mathematics and ICT. Other areas are satisfactory although there are some problems of access and circulation around the site. Resources are satisfactory. They are very good for ICT, particularly in the computer suites in the new building, and good for mathematics. In other areas they are satisfactory, save for a shortage of textbooks which impacted on English, science, history, and religious education. The library is short of fiction and multicultural books.

Care, guidance and support

The school provides **satisfactory** care for all its students. Learning mentors provide valuable help for students who have a range of problems, and the students' introduction to Year 7 is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has good induction arrangements for students who join in Year 7, and students are given valuable guidance about options when they leave school.
- There are good systems and procedures for ensuring students' health and safety, and they are well looked after if they are ill.
- Students' views have not been sought regularly, and they do not feel they have a say in the decision-making of the school.

Commentary

41. Parents and students expressed satisfaction with the steps the school takes to settle students in when they start in Year 7. Prospective students are visited in their primary schools, and information is passed on to their form tutors. A transition learning mentor gives good support to students who might otherwise find it difficult to transfer from primary to secondary school. Careers and work-related education are good, and benefit from well-established links with careers advisers, local colleges and employers. Relationships with the Connexions (careers service) are good and students have access to a range of information and advice. During the inspection, Connexions arranged a good theatre presentation for Year 11 students on the value of higher education.

42. The arrangements for first aid and health and safety are good. A full-time member of staff co-ordinates first aid and is based in a well-equipped medical room. Detailed records are kept of students with long-term medical problems, and there are thorough procedures for the administration of medicines. Regular health and safety checks are made, any potential hazards recorded and appropriate action taken.

43. Child protection measures are sound. Students who are on the 'at risk' register are monitored carefully, and staff are aware of the needs of those who live in care or foster homes. Senior members of staff, together with the education welfare officer, provide good support for students with

particular problems, involving outside agencies such as the educational psychologist and social services as appropriate. Learning mentors provide valuable help for students who have a range of problems, including those at risk of disaffection and those with specific medical conditions.

44. Students value the support they receive from individual members of staff. They appreciate the recognition given to them for particular achievements, in the newsletters, and the awards and certificate evenings. However, students reported that they do not feel the school takes adequate steps to consult them over school issues. The school council is being re-formed, but is not yet an effective forum for influencing change in the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is **unsatisfactory** because parents do not receive sufficient information about their children's progress and the school does not involve parents enough in its work. Parents have too little impact on the work of the school. The school's links with the community are **satisfactory**, and it has **good** relationships with local schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school does not consult parents enough about its work, and could do more to involve them in their children's education.
- Links with the local community help to raise the school's profile and provide opportunities for students to develop academically and personally.
- Good links with other schools and colleges ensure effective transition between different stages of education.

Commentary

45. In their responses to the questionnaire and at the meeting before the inspection, many parents expressed concerns about the school. Although the majority felt that the school expects their child to work hard and do his or her best, parents are unhappy with the quality of teaching, students' behaviour and the leadership and management of the school. The findings of the inspection agree with their concerns, but also found that the school's expectations are not high enough.

46. Parents have too little involvement in the life of the school and the school is not always well supported by parents. A small number serve as governors, but few help in the school and the parents' association is now defunct. The school encourages parents to raise concerns about their children, but many feel their concerns are not acted upon consistently and effectively. The school recognises that more could be done to encourage parents to become involved in their children's education, and is working out ways of doing this.

47. Although the school provides reports three times a year, the information given is inadequate. Parents are given a series of numbers relating to their children's effort and achievement in each subject, but have too little written information about the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. The school knows that parents are not happy with the reports and is intending to make improvements to them this year.

48. The school has established some links with the community and outside organisations. These benefit students' academic and personal development, and help to promote a positive image of the school in the local area. The physical education department arranges a wide range of sporting fixtures against other local schools, and, through its Sportsmark award, the school has developed good relationships with the local football, cricket and golf clubs. Links between the school and the local colleges provide additional learning opportunities for students and also prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

49. Strong partnerships with primary schools result in successful transfer arrangements, good induction procedures and the receipt of relevant information when students enter Year 7.

Collaboration with primary schools, on ICT and design and technology projects, has benefited both primary and secondary students.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the school is led and managed **poorly**. Leadership and management are both poor, and governance is **unsatisfactory**. Monitoring of teaching and learning is particularly weak. The school did not take suitable action in response to the key issues raised by the last inspection report, and so they remain unresolved.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Those with leadership and management responsibilities have not ensured that policies have been implemented consistently, and checked on the impact of decisions that have been made.
- Planning for the school's development is not sufficiently focused on raising standards and improving the quality of education.
- The governing body has not helped the school enough by being a critical friend, and has not ensured that statutory responsibilities are met.
- The school does too little to ensure that it provides good value for money.

Commentary

50. The headteacher provides the school with satisfactory leadership. He has a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Since his appointment in January 2001, he has worked hard to improve the school, with the beginnings of success in several subject areas. He has consistently pursued the appointment of good staff, supported those who were under-performing and removed some who were ineffective.

51. The members of the senior leadership team share the headteacher's vision of the school but are pre-occupied with dealing with daily tasks and incidents. This means that they have not given sufficient focus to raising standards and improving teaching and learning. They have not ensured that decisions are followed through and policies are implemented. For example, during the week of the inspection, senior staff were regularly seen around the school but did not check that staff implemented the school behaviour policy properly, which contributed to the indiscipline in many lessons.

52. The significant weaknesses in the senior management team and among others with management responsibilities, including at head of department level, also explain the school's lack of attention to improving the areas identified as weak by the last inspection. In particular, monitoring of standards and the quality of teaching and learning are inadequate. For example, the analysis of performance data by individual subject areas lacks sophistication and too easily dismisses low standards as a result of staff turnover and poor student behaviour.

53. The management of the provision for students with special needs is unsatisfactory. The co-ordinator's role is currently confined to the management of statements and associated individual education plans, and the other provision is lead and managed by other staff.

54. The provision for students who speak English as an additional language has not been managed effectively. There has been insufficiently clear focus on identifying students' specific learning needs and finding appropriate ways of meeting them.

55. The planning for the development of the school as a whole is poor, and this contributes to unfocused planning for subject areas. The current development plan is little more than a list of actions with no clear rationale, and no obvious links between priorities and the school's strategic direction. Forward planning has too often been overtaken by unexpected events, including problems arising from high staff turnover.

56. The governance of the school is unsatisfactory. The governing body is strongly committed to the school, supportive of its work, and proud of the new building, which governors believe has given

a boost to students and staff. However, the governors have been too reliant on the headteacher for information and evaluations of the school's work. They have not done enough to challenge the school on its key weaknesses and to monitor its improvement in the issues raised by the last inspection. The school does not meet its statutory responsibilities to provide a daily act of collective worship and for covering the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education.

57. Governors are now aware of what needs to be done. They know that the GCSE results in 2003 are disappointing, and that recruiting and retaining good teachers is a priority because of the impact of staff turnover on students' learning and achievement. However, their awareness of the academic performance of the school in a national context is under-developed, and they have not done enough to ensure that the headteacher and other staff with management responsibilities carry them out well.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	£3,968,157	Balance from previous year	£92,050
Total expenditure	£3,978,526	Balance carried forward to the next	£81,681
Expenditure per student	£3,571		

Commentary

58. A substantial proportion of the school's overall budget is provided as specific grants. These are allocated and spent as required. The funding for students with special educational needs and for students for whom English is an additional language is spent appropriately. Tendering for the new building works was done carefully, with attention to getting the best quotations.

59. However, the school has not systematically challenged itself on educational matters, particularly whether it provides value for money in relation to the standards students attain and their achievement. Students' performance in tests and examinations is reviewed in the light of national data, but the findings of this analysis have had limited impact in improving teaching and learning. Parents and students are not consulted sufficiently, and the school has not monitored the impact of its decisions sufficiently.

60. The school has faced some barriers to improvement since the last inspection. The weaknesses in leadership and management at senior management and head of department level have been a major barrier to development. The high staff turnover has meant that recruitment difficulties have taken up considerable management time, and it has taken time to induct new staff into the school's systems. Under the present headteacher a more purposeful approach is being adopted, and positive changes are now beginning to happen. Despite recent signs of improvement, the key issues identified by the last inspection were not tackled sufficiently well and the school has declined. It no longer provides an acceptable standard of education and its students are underachieving.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the Year 9 tests improved in 2003.
- GCSE results were below national figures in 2002, and fell further in 2003.
- Standards of work are lower than they should be, and students are underachieving.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory because the work is often unchallenging, and so students learn too little in lessons.
- The department is poorly led and managed, and has not improved since the last inspection.

Commentary

61. The overall results in the Year 9 tests were below average in 2003 and in most other years since the last inspection. The 2003 results went up considerably as the school had provided booster sessions to help students do well. Students did as well as predicted from their results in the Year 6 tests three years earlier. The 2002 GCSE results were below average in English, with few students gaining the top grades. The English results fell considerably in 2003. In English literature, the 2002 results were below average but rose in 2003. As fewer students were entered for the examination, this did not reflect a real rise in standards.

62. Standards of students' work are below expectations in Year 9, and well below expectations in Year 11. Students are underachieving because of weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum followed. In particular, students are given too few opportunities for writing independently and writing for a variety of purposes. They are best at writing stories, which often show a good awareness of how to entertain a reader through lively choices of language. Many students' handwriting is untidy, and they make basic mistakes in spelling and punctuation. Average and lower-attaining students have to do many exercises that have not improved the quality of their independent writing. In studying literature, students of all ages are best at commenting on the plot and characters, but have difficulty in exploring the texts' themes and issues, and how language is used.

63. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. Teaching and learning were good in a small proportion of the lessons observed during the inspection. Here, the work was interesting and its pace and relevance kept all students involved. Teachers questioned students well, checking and challenging their understanding. However, many other lessons had significant weaknesses that led to students making insufficient progress. These included teachers being unable to gain and hold students' interest, and setting work that was too easy. Students were bored in these lessons, and made little effort. Other key weaknesses are that teachers rarely pay enough attention to adapting the work to meet students' needs, and most marking is uninformative.

64. Poor leadership and management are reflected in many organisational weaknesses that have affected students' achievement. The curriculum planning is inadequate, does not provide for ICT within English, and does not make links to other subjects such as drama. The department has not kept appropriate records which track how well students are doing during the school year. Teachers' effectiveness has not been monitored systematically, and the department does not have the policy statements and guidance it needs for consistency and to help new staff work effectively. In many ways, the department is weaker now than at the time of the last inspection and so its development is poor.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

65. The provision for students to develop their language and literacy skills in other subjects is unsatisfactory because it has not been managed properly. As a result, teachers' practice is inconsistent. Where it is successful, notably in ICT, teachers are good at developing students' skills in speaking and listening, and at broadening their vocabulary. They give students plenty of opportunities to improve their skills in reading and writing, such as through redrafting their written work. Several subjects have policy statements that give relevant guidance, but they are used inconsistently. In most subjects, students have not had enough opportunities for independent writing. This affects their attainment in subjects such as art and design, design and technology, geography, history, mathematics and religious education, particularly when they have too little support for writing their GCSE coursework.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving as a result of teachers' higher expectations and students' more positive attitudes.
- Schemes of work are not yet adapted to the needs of all students so that higher attaining students are not sufficiently stretched to reach their potential.
- Monitoring of the department is not rigorous enough to identify strengths and act upon weaknesses.

Commentary

66. The overall teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well below the national average for both languages, and have been consistently so since 2001. The 2002 GCSE results in French were in line with the national average. The results fell in 2003, with a marked decline in girls' results. The 2002 GCSE results in German were well below the national average. Girls did better than boys, in relation to girls' and boys' performance nationally.

67. Standards in Year 9 are below the national expectation. They are higher than the test results because of teachers' higher expectations of students' conduct and students' more positive attitudes which enable them to make better progress. A greater emphasis on developing competence in grammar is helping students to extract more information when they read. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Lower-attaining students make secure gains in knowledge, although teachers do not plan lessons that have activities that meet the needs of students with learning difficulties.

68. Standards in Year 11 are below the national expectation. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Average-attaining students make the most progress as the scheme of work is designed to improve their chances of success at the C/D grades. Higher-attaining students do not reach their potential, as the new scheme of work has not been sufficiently adapted to accelerate their learning.

69. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers set clear objectives and use activities which develop students' receptive skills well. Praise and encouragement are effective in motivating students. Good use is made of questioning and teachers are careful to include all students in this. Assessment of work in class is regular, but not exploited to further improve learning or fully engage students. Homework provides too few opportunities to consolidate the work of the lesson. There are examples of good marking practice, but these are not the norm.

70. Leadership and management are now satisfactory. Recent stability in the running of the department is beginning to improve students' perceptions of learning French and German. However, the schemes of work are not yet adapted to the needs of all students. Monitoring of the department is not rigorous enough to identify strengths and act upon weaknesses. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved from a low base, but results have remained low and weaknesses in assessment have not been corrected.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in mathematics were significantly below the national average in 2002 and declined further in 2003.
- Departmental meetings are used well to develop a strong team approach and documentation provides useful information on departmental policies and practices.
- Monitoring of classroom practice and students' work is not rigorous enough.

Commentary

71. Results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average and increasing at a rate which matched the national trend. The 2003 results saw an increase in the proportion of students at the highest level. Students did as well as predicted from their results in the Year 6 tests three years earlier. At the end of Year 11, the 2002 GCSE results were significantly below the national average. Provisional results for 2003 show that there has been a further decline in results.

72. At the end of Year 9, standards of work seen in lessons and in students' books are below average. The achievement of students at the end of Year 9 is satisfactory overall. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 vary, but are below average overall as a result of the poor behaviour of a significant minority of students. The achievement of students at the end of Year 11 is unsatisfactory overall.

73. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers make good use of a range of new technology, including interactive white boards to display key words and teaching strategies. Starter activities provide a prompt start to the lesson, and the pace of lessons is improved by setting time limits for completing work. Occasionally, students' unsatisfactory attitudes and poor behaviour caused significant disruptions which were not dealt with well enough by the teacher. In these lessons, teachers had few strategies for dealing with such behaviour. There are inconsistencies across the department in setting homework and marking books.

74. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The department is now fully staffed and departmental meetings are used well to develop a strong team approach. The subject leader undertakes some monitoring of the department but it is as yet insufficiently rigorous. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, largely as a result of staffing difficulties in previous years.

Mathematics across the curriculum

75. The provision for students to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects is satisfactory. Successful practice was seen in science, geography and design and technology. For example in design and technology, teachers made good use of graphs and charts to develop students' understanding. The mathematics department has produced a set of individual education plans which show numeracy targets for individual students, but these are not used extensively across the school. Staff in other subject areas have been supported by whole-school training on the use of mathematics across the curriculum, and students' overall mathematical competence is satisfactory.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving, particularly in Years 10 and 11, because of the greater emphasis on quality coursework and module tests.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall as some teachers have difficulty managing students whose poor behaviour impacts on learning.
- The leadership of the department is now very good, which is leading to improvements within the department.
- Resources, in terms of available textbooks and technician time, are inadequate.

Commentary

76. Results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average, and better than previous years. However, students did not do as well as those with a similar score in the 2000 Year 6 tests. GCSE results were below the national average in 2003. The results in double award science were broadly average, with boys doing considerably better than girls. The results in single award science, which is taken mainly by girls, were significantly lower than the national average. Overall, students did relatively well in science, compared to their performance in their other subjects.

77. Standards of attainment are below average at the end of Year 9. The students' progress is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Some students are making good progress in Years 7 and 8, for example in their imaginative extended writing. Standards are below average in Year 11, and improving as a result of teachers' increased emphasis on quality coursework and module tests. Boys' progress is now good as they have positive attitudes to the subject and have responded well to the module tests and demands of the coursework, whereas girls' progress is satisfactory. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory because of previous weaknesses in teaching and learning. Students following the 'golden curriculum' achieve well as a result of different teaching styles and good behaviour management.

78. Teaching and learning are still unsatisfactory overall, although improving. The best teaching included very good behaviour management and meticulous marking which showed students what they must do to improve their work. It also included good training in laboratory techniques and extension work for the higher-attaining students. However, weaknesses in teaching still exist. During the inspection, teachers in two-fifths of the lessons had difficulty managing students whose poor behaviour impacts on learning. These teachers used a narrow range of teaching styles and relied too heavily on written materials to do the teaching for them. Copying from the board or from books wasted too much time. In some lessons, a shortage of textbooks undermined opportunities for teaching and learning. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, six students were required to share the same textbook.

79. The leadership of the department is now very good. In a short period of time, an effective team has been built through regular meetings and targeted support. Departmental monitoring is very thorough. Weaknesses in teaching have been identified and appropriate support has been provided. Management is good but weaknesses in teaching still remain and departmental policies are not universally followed. Schemes of work have been rewritten and good use is now made of data to identify underachieving students as well as highlight topic areas which are badly answered. Resources in terms of available textbooks and technician time are inadequate. This is limiting the opportunities teachers can offer their students. Despite the rapid, recent changes, the improvement in science since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement in ICT as a subject is good in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching and learning are good and teachers have a good range of strategies for dealing with the unsatisfactory behaviour of students.
- The comprehensive assessment and tracking system are good.
- Leadership and management are good, and the strengths and weaknesses of the department are well understood.
- The use of ICT in other subject areas is unsatisfactory, with limited access for some subject areas.

Commentary

80. In 2003, the Year 9 teachers' assessments were above the national average, and higher than in previous years. Boys' results were better than girls' results when compared to the national averages for boys and girls. Results in Year 11 were in line with the national average in 2002, but have fluctuated over the last five years and dropped in 2003 as a result of students not completing their coursework.

81. Standards of students' work are above the national expectation at the end of Year 9 and in line with the national expectation at the end of Year 11. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. The students in Years 7 to 9 have the most positive attitudes towards learning, and their achievement is good. This is due to good teaching in the new ICT building, and homework which is used well to extend the work of the lesson. The work seen confirmed that students' literacy and numeracy skills are being enhanced throughout the work. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good because of the different teaching approaches used by teachers.

82. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good range of strategies for dealing with unsatisfactory behaviour. They demonstrate good subject knowledge and make good use of a range of resources, including laptops and interactive white boards, to make the lessons more interesting. However, some teachers lack confidence in the use of new technology as they have not yet received sufficient training. The comprehensive assessment and tracking system are strengths of the department. It enables staff to identify those who are not doing well enough, and to tailor the work to individual needs. Consequently, activities are well matched to students' abilities and interests, and students with special education needs and those with English as an additional language are well supported.

83. ICT is well led and managed. Development planning is clear and correctly identifies priorities and actions which are linked to the improvement of teaching and learning. Data protection and child protection issues are fully covered. Accommodation and resources are now good, but difficulties arise when computers are out of use because it takes a long time to get them repaired. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

84. The use of ICT in other subjects is unsatisfactory. Most subjects do too little to meet the ICT requirements of the National Curriculum. Assessment of cross-curricular ICT is weak. The long length of time taken for repairs to computers leads to frustration in subject areas. However, students experience good use of computer-aided design and control technology in design and technology and, in Year 7 science, students' work includes the use of spreadsheets and word processing. Physical education makes good use of digital video to develop slow-frame coaching techniques, and teachers are learning to make good use of the new interactive white boards that have been recently installed.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High-attaining students are not sufficiently challenged and students with special educational needs lack support.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because of students' weak literacy skills and poor concentration.
- Good relationships between teachers and students have a positive effect on learning.
- Homework is regularly set and carefully marked, and so students know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve.
- Monitoring and evaluation are insufficient to ensure that inconsistencies in teaching are reduced.

Commentary

85. Teachers' assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 shows students' attainment was in line with the national average. The Year 9 results in 2003 continue the upward trend of recent years. However, the 2002 GCSE results were well below the national average. The results improved from 1999 to 2002 but fell in 2003. Girls performed much better than boys.

86. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with the national expectation. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory, although they are doing less well in the classes taught by the less-qualified teachers. Students have a sound understanding of key ideas and have adequate knowledge of places on a local, national and global scale. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below the national average. They are higher than the GCSE results as students are now doing better in their coursework and making good use of computers. Nevertheless, students lack confidence with written work, and weaknesses in their literacy skills lower the quality of their work. Year 11 students' short concentration span limits classroom discussion. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11.

87. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although with a range from unsatisfactory to good in the teaching seen. Teachers are clear about what students are expected to learn, and share this information with their classes. This helps students to focus on the key points of the lesson. Teachers pay particular attention to explaining the meaning of geographical words. Good relationships between teachers and students have a positive effect on learning. However, lessons lack variety in the methods used. Teachers sometimes do not expect enough of students, and this leads to insufficiently challenging work that does not maintain their interest. This tends to affect the learning of high-attaining students. Students with special educational needs are not given enough support, except for those who study geography in the 'golden curriculum'. Homework is regularly set and carefully marked, helping students to become aware of how they are doing and how to improve.

88. The leadership and management of the department are sound. The development plan has clear objectives and success criteria, but monitoring and evaluation are not so strong. Good practice is not shared enough, to reduce the inconsistencies in teaching. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection but areas of weakness still remain, for example in the development of students' analytical skills.

History

Provision in history is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below expectations and significant numbers of students are under-achieving.
- New schemes of work and regular checks on homework and marking are beginning to improve students' learning.
- Monitoring has not been carried out sufficiently to identify weaknesses, so that they can be improved.
- Resources are unsatisfactory for the skills and interests of lower- and middle-attaining students.

Commentary

89. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average, partly because of students' weak literacy skills. The 2002 GCSE results were well below the national average. Students did better in their coursework than in the examination. The 2003 GCSE results showed a further fall.

90. Standards are below average in Year 9, and significant numbers of students do not make sufficient progress. Their historical skills do not improve enough and their knowledge is weak. For example, few students are able to give clear reasons for events in the past. Students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory as they are falling further behind students nationally. In Year 10, a recently-introduced history of medicine course has enabled students to develop their historical understanding and analytical skills well. In Year 11, standards are below the national average because of a continuing weakness in students' literacy skills. Overall, students' achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11.

91. Teaching and learning are now satisfactory. In the well-taught lessons observed during the inspection, students were set appropriate challenges and the activities interested them. For example, Year 10 students worked well collaboratively, and enjoyed learning about Greek medicine. They produced good-quality work in response to the teacher's high expectations of them. However, when the teaching did not provide enough interest and challenge, students' learning was unsatisfactory and, occasionally, their behaviour was unacceptable. Resources in history are unsatisfactory as they are inappropriate for developing the skills and interests of lower- and middle-attaining students.

92. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. New schemes of work and regular checks on homework and marking are beginning to have a positive effect on the department's work. However, teaching and learning have not been monitored effectively, to identify weaknesses and act upon them. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. However, with the recently-improved leadership and management of the department, actions to raise standards are beginning to have an effect.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below the national average and achievement is unsatisfactory because of a lack of time to cover the subject.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because of the use of non-specialist staff.
- Recently-introduced assessment strategies are beginning to improve students' understanding of their level of work.
- The new head of department has begun to identify strategies for raising standards and improving achievement especially in Years 10 and 11.

- Resources are unsatisfactory because books are old and students have limited access to ICT.

Commentary

93. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were below the national average in 2003. Insufficient time has been given to religious education and so some areas of the local Agreed Syllabus have not been covered properly, especially those which deal with making sense of religion and reflecting on personal development. Results at the end of Year 11 were well below the national average in 2002, and the short-course GCSE results in 2003 showed a further decline.

94. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below the national expectation, and students' achievement is unsatisfactory. This is because of a lack of time for religious education. In Years 10 and 11, standards are below the national expectation, and achievement is unsatisfactory. It is not possible for students to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding and reflective capacity within the present time allocation.

95. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9. In the lessons seen, good teaching was characterised by careful planning, clear objectives, brisk pace and good subject knowledge. Challenging behaviour is managed well and teachers' presentation, humour and respect contributed to the development of good relationships. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The non-specialist staff lack the subject expertise needed. Recently-introduced assessment strategies are beginning to improve students' understanding of their level of work, and targets are provided, but these are not specific to religious education.

96. A recent change in the leadership of the department is leading to a clearer vision of how to raise standards. Strategies for raising standards and improving achievement, especially in Years 10 and 11, are being identified but, as yet, have not had any impact. Resources are unsatisfactory as the books are dated and students have limited access to ICT. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Provision in technology is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' assessments in Year 9 were well below the national average and the 2002 GCSE results were significantly below the national average.
- Inexperienced and unqualified teachers have few strategies for dealing with the casual attitudes and poor behaviour of students in their classes.
- Students are given good advice on how to improve and, where necessary, teaching is modified in the light of assessment information.
- Development planning does not identify how success will be monitored and inconsistencies in teaching are not being dealt with adequately.
- Health and safety procedures are not monitored rigorously.

Commentary

97. Teacher assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average in 2003, a considerable fall from the 2002 results. The 2002 GCSE results were significantly below the national average. Over the last five years, all areas of the subject except graphics have shown a decline in results. Significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist staff have contributed to the fall in results.

98. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below the national expectation. Inconsistencies in teaching, a lack of challenge and slow pace in many lessons are resulting in unsatisfactory achievement overall. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below the national average. Students lack understanding of the design processes due to ineffective teaching. In the samples of work seen, too much of the drawing had been done with a ruler and had a mechanistic approach which limited

students' creativity. Their achievement is unsatisfactory and students' lack of experience in applying the design process throughout their studies is a serious weakness.

99. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. They are weakest in Years 10 and 11 as inexperienced and unqualified teachers have too few strategies for dealing with the casual attitudes and poor behaviour of students in their classes. Unsatisfactory lessons are exemplified by a lack of challenge and too much reliance on worksheets and copying. The pace in lessons is often slow. The schemes of work are much laboured, for example making a metal coat hook or wooden pencil holder over thirteen hours. Assessment is a strength of the teaching and students are constantly reminded of their grades, given good advice on how to improve and, where necessary, teaching is modified to reflect the personal targets of the students. Homework routines are well established but not implemented consistently by all teachers.

100. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. There is a clear vision for the department, experience of participation in technology events across the country and good links to industry. However, the management of the department is unsatisfactory. Development planning does not identify how success will be monitored and inconsistencies in teaching are not being dealt with adequately. Health and safety procedures are not rigorously monitored and so, for example, a fire escape was found to be closed off. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, with falling examination results and more weaknesses than were reported by the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Lessons were sampled in drama and dance, but insufficient work was seen to form overall judgements about provision in these subjects.

Commentary

101. Two lessons were seen in drama, in Years 8 and 10. In both lessons, the teaching and learning were very good although the standards which students attained were lower than expected for their age. Students' achievement is unsatisfactory, largely because they have not gained the knowledge and skills they should have from previous work in drama.

102. Dance is taught well in Years 7 to 9, within the physical education programme. Students learned well because they were given the opportunity to plan their own sequence of work and collaborate in developing ideas in groups. The use of popular music to stimulate students' creativity, resulted in good presentations. Students were well engaged by the practical work, but have more difficulty with written tasks in lessons and put less effort into doing them.

Art and design

Provision in art is **poor**.

Main weaknesses

- Teacher assessments in art and design are inaccurate, and GCSE results in 2002 were significantly below the national average.
- Students' lack of coursework, missed deadlines and poor motivation contribute to their low results and under-achievement.
- Teachers do not cater for the spread of ability within classes, and have too few strategies for dealing with poor behaviour.

Commentary

103. Year 9 teacher assessments in art and design were inaccurate in 2002, as they were too generous. GCSE results in 2002 were well below the national average and fell further in 2003. Students' results in art are lower than in most of their other subjects. Boys' results are lower than girls' results, with a bigger difference than nationally. Since the last inspection, results have fallen dramatically. Students' lack of coursework, missed deadlines and poor motivation account in part for these results.

104. Standards seen during the inspection were well below national expectation. Achievement is unsatisfactory. Students lack confidence in drawing and painting because their skills have not been built on systematically from year to year. Students are particularly weak in evaluating their own work, partly because they have not been used to reflecting on it or viewing it critically, but also because they are not familiar with the technical or descriptive words needed in the subject.

105. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge, provide adequate resources and demonstrate well. However, lessons are ineffective because teachers do not cater for the spread of ability and have only a limited number of strategies for dealing with students' unsatisfactory attitudes and their poor behaviour. Teachers are encouraging in their one-to-one discussions with students, but the guidance provided is not developmental or challenging enough. The portfolios of students in Year 10 and 11 are sparse. They have not evaluated their work in any depth, and lack specialist vocabulary. Students show little pride in their work.

106. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The new head of department has brought energy and enthusiasm to the role but weaknesses in teaching exist and staff have too few strategies for dealing with the inappropriate behaviour of students in the classroom. Courses are now planned to ensure greater progression from year to year and to ensure conformity across groups. There is also a determination to raise the profile of art with a new art club and certificates and prizes for good work and effort. Unfortunately, this is too late to identify or adequately respond to the weaknesses in older students' work. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well below the national average.
- Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11, especially in composition work.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 as the work is undemanding.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because of a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the department.
- Performance data is not readily available or shared with the department, and priorities for improvement are not sufficiently considered.

Commentary

107. Standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well below the national average. The school did not meet statutory requirements last year as music was not taught to all students, because of staffing difficulties. This has affected students' achievement and attainment in Years 7 to 9. The 2002 GCSE results were below the national average. The results fell in 2003.

108. Standards are well below the national expectation at the end of Year 9 and students' achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Some teaching offers appropriate pace and challenge. Too often, however, musical tasks do not cater for students' differing abilities, especially for those who are taking additional music lessons, and so students make less progress than they should. Standards in Year 11, although below the national expectation, are rising especially in composition work. Here, students perform using voice, keyboards, guitars and other available resources. Students demonstrate confident improvisation and creative application of musical skills and so their achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 11.

109. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. In the lessons seen, they ranged from satisfactory to poor. Teaching was most effective when the teacher's good command of the subject engaged students and when they were actively engaged in music making. However, the teaching does not encourage students to listen critically, nor offer sufficient opportunities for creative

and imaginative music making. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because students are more fully involved in music making and their compositions are both creative and imaginative. In these lessons, teaching enables students to make decisions about resources and, through effective on-going assessment and support, to reflect on their emerging work, refine and improve it.

110. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because of a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the department as well as a failure to support unqualified teachers. Performance data is not readily available or shared with the department and priorities for improvement are not sufficiently considered. These features and the high turnover of staff have resulted in unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection, particularly in relation to whole school issues.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have shown a considerable improvement since the last inspection.
- Students' work is regularly assessed and so they have a good idea of their level of performance but are less skilled at describing the performance of other students.
- The wide range of extra-curricular sports activities provides very good opportunities for all students and the uptake is also very good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good with a strong commitment to teamwork and to the students.

Commentary

111. In 2003, students' performance, knowledge and understanding were in line with national averages although the teacher assessments under-rate the standard they attained. The 2002 GCSE results were in line with the national average, representing a considerable improvement since the last inspection. The 2003 results saw a further improvement in GCSE results.

112. On the basis of work seen, standards in Year 9 are in line with the national average and the students' skills in football, rugby, netball and hockey are good. As students enter the school with below average standards overall, their achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 in core lessons were in line with the national expectation. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Standards for students following the GCSE course are above expectations. Students develop their practical skills well, showing good achievement overall although less so in their theory work because of literacy difficulties. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers.

113. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge is used to plan good activities that develop the students' skills well. Teachers provide a wide range of interesting tasks. For example, in a very good netball lesson, Year 8 students' learning was very good because of their response to the challenge of having to plan their own tactics and select the positions in which they would play. Students' work is regularly assessed and they have a good idea of their level of performance but are less skilled at describing the performance of other students. When lessons were less well organised, the interest of a small number of students dropped and their progress was less good.

114. The leadership and management of the subject are good. A strong commitment to teamwork and to the students underpins the work of the department. Teachers are good role models for students and there is a clear vision of how to improve further. The wide range of extra-curricular sports activities provides very good opportunities for all students and the take-up is also very good. Gifted and talented sports players have many opportunities to play at county level and the school has good links with local sports clubs. The Sportsmark Award shows the success of this work. The

changing area for staff is poor, and storage facilities are needed for learning resources. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

It was only possible to sample one lesson each of the manufacturing and leisure and tourism courses. Insufficient work was seen to form an overall judgement about provision in the subjects.

Commentary

115. The GNVQ manufacturing course has been successful in providing students with a vocational course closely linked to local industry. Students have a good experience of working with cosmetics, textiles printing, and food production companies. The assessment system is comprehensive and used well. In the satisfactory lesson seen, technology was used very well and the teacher demonstrated good subject knowledge. However, some students showed signs of underachievement as a result of their casual attitudes towards their work. The pace of the lesson was slow, and students failed to make full use of the time available.

116. The GNVQ leisure and tourism course is a newly-established vocational course which offers an opportunity for students to learn about an area where local employment opportunities exist. In the lesson seen, students learned well because the teacher helped them to use the Internet to undertake research work. The teacher's good use of encouragement, and adaptation of tasks to meet their individual needs, helped each student enjoy the work. They learned well because they developed new skills that allowed them to use the computer independently to gather data.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good knowledge of the business world and their enthusiasm for the subject makes it interesting to the students.
- Opportunities to further extend students' work are occasionally missed when better use could be made of students' local knowledge.
- Assessment is good and work is assessed against clear criteria with reasons for grades provided.
- Good schemes of work are in place and the department uses examination data well to raise the standards attained by students.

Commentary

117. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with the national average, and the 2003 results showed a further improvement. Students in Years 10 and 11 are attaining in line with the national expectation. They explain issues, such as privatisation and nationalisation, well. Their gains in knowledge, skills and understanding show that their achievement is good overall.

118. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good knowledge of the business world and their enthusiasm for the subject makes it interesting to the students. Learning is enhanced because the students are given a wide range of challenging activities in which they have to take responsibility, make decisions and complete a series of appropriate tasks. They work well collaboratively, and learn from one another. In the 'hot-seat question time', students are challenged by their peers to explain business terms and this dynamic learning style motivates them well. Opportunities to further extend students' work are occasionally missed when better use could be made of students' local knowledge.

119. Assessment is good as work is assessed against clear criteria with reasons for grades provided. Each piece of work is assessed against clear criteria and student receive a sheet on which

the reasons for their grades are shown, when a piece of work is marked. This helps them to see what they need to do in order to tackle the next assignment better.

120. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Priorities for development have been identified and new practice in assessment is already under way. Good schemes of work are in place and examination performance is analysed satisfactorily. However, teaching and learning are not sufficiently monitored, partly due to a lack of management time. Staff development opportunities are insufficient and staff turnover is problematic in ensuring continuity.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main weaknesses

- The quality of teaching provided to different tutor groups varies widely, and is unsatisfactory overall.
- Assessment procedures are still being developed.
- The school does not do enough to monitor teaching and to share good and very good practice.

Commentary

121. There are no test or examination results yet as the course is new. However, the work seen indicated that students' attainment is below expectations in all years, although with wide variation between tutor groups. Students' achievement is unsatisfactory overall, as delivery is patchy and students' involvement and progress is dependent on the quality of teaching.

122. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. Many teachers are still new to the subject and lack experience in the teaching approaches appropriate for this subject. However, good teaching was observed in a Year 9 class who investigated political, economic and social issues in the imaginary country of Myssia. A series of successful lessons had engaged the class in discussion and, as a result, students all presented considered opinions and extended writing of quality on Myssia's government, with arguments for and against the development of the country. Students had made good gains in their understanding of being informed citizens with responsibilities. In other classes, for example in Year 10, average and lower-attaining students are not engaged in the work. Their writing is over-reliant on worksheets, which are often incomplete or spoiled by poor handwriting, careless spelling and incorrect punctuation.

123. Citizenship is led and managed satisfactorily. Its introduction has been managed successfully, and further development of the course is giving teachers a clearer structure to work to. Assessment is yet to be developed, but the school is working with local schools to devise appropriate arrangements. There are tentative arrangements to modify provision but the school does not do enough to monitor teaching and share good and very good practice.

Citizenship across the curriculum

124. Some work relating to citizenship occurs through other subjects. For example, in history work on Greek medicine evolved into a discussion on treatment of and attitudes to HIV and SARS. In geography and in leisure and tourism, students learn about local facilities and visit places of local importance. During the inspection, students were involved in voting for representatives on the town's youth council and older students were considering the forthcoming election for a local youth MP.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	6
How inclusive the school is	5
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	6
Value for money provided by the school	6
Overall standards achieved	5
Students' achievement	5
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	5
Attendance	5
Attitudes	5
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	6
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	5
The quality of education provided by the school	6
The quality of teaching	6
How well student learn	6
The quality of assessment	5
How well the curriculum meets student needs	5
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	4
Accommodation and resources	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety	4
Support, advice and guidance for students	5
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	5
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	5
The quality of the school's links with the community	4
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	6
The governance of the school	5
The leadership of the headteacher	4
The leadership of other key staff	6
The effectiveness of management	6

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).