

INSPECTION REPORT

DORCAN TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Swindon

LEA area: Swindon

Unique reference number: 126450

Headteacher: Dr Scott Sissons

Lead inspector: Romy Markham

Dates of inspection: 1-5 December 2003

Inspection number: 258613

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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Terms used in this report

Students transfer to Dorcan at the beginning of Year 7. Most students follow the same National Curriculum subjects in Years 7 to 9. At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Students in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to choose some of the subjects they will study, according to their individual interests and aptitudes. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**).

Inspectors judge the standards students reach by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for students of the same age nationally. The students' achievements reflect whether they have done as well as expected. Such judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, similar schools are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-16
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1313
School address:	St Paul's Drive Swindon Wiltshire
Postcode:	SN3 5DA
Telephone number:	01793 525231
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Alexa Donachy
Date of previous inspection:	12 October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Dorcan is a specialist technology college providing education for 1313 boys and girls aged 11-16, almost all of whom come from six local primary schools. Very few students enter or leave the school at times other than at the start of the school year. The school has changed significantly since the last inspection. It is much larger than other secondary schools, following the closure of a nearby secondary school and transfer of its students to Dorcan. The students are predominantly White British, although 17 students are currently in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs is broadly average and includes those with moderate learning and behavioural difficulties. However, the proportion of students with a formal Statement of Special Educational Needs is below average. There has been a large increase in the proportion of students coming from families with difficult financial or social circumstances. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average and reflects an area with high unemployment. As a technology college Dorcan has an extensive network of partnerships with other schools and is the lead school for a local teacher training initiative. There are community facilities on site, family learning programmes and support services. The school achieved a European languages award in 1999 and the Schools Curriculum Award in 1997.

Standards of attainment on entry to the school are below average overall but there are considerable variations between subjects and year groups. Standards of the current Year 10 and 11 students were well below average on entry to the school, whereas those of students in Years 7 to 9 were below average. However, these students also had increasing levels of economic and social deprivation that affected their achievements. Standards on entry in English and literacy were particularly weak in all year groups.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1387	R Markham	Lead inspector	
12775	J Goodchild	Lay inspector	
12499	M Durkin	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
23528	A Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics
30825	K Hayton	Team inspector	Science
8552	W Hart	Team inspector	Design and technology
8672	M Roberts	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
31649	R Marsden	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
15462	C Blakemore	Team inspector	History; geography
30518	M Johnson	Team inspector	Art and design
24026	C Holland	Team inspector	Music
25748	R Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education; citizenship
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	Special educational needs
13122	S Matthews	Team inspector	Business and vocational subjects

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Standards are below average but students are achieving well compared with their levels of attainment on entry to the school. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was good overall but improvements are needed in the provision for students' literacy skills and their personal development. Leadership and management are good and committed to improving achievement. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- There is strong leadership throughout the school and a commitment to improvement.
- Curriculum provision is good in Years 10 and 11, particularly for lower attaining students and those with special educational needs and in providing enrichment programmes and community links.
- The school has made good progress in meeting its aims as a technology college, in making good provision and raising standards in design and technology, science and information and communication technology (ICT) and in generating effective partnerships and networks with other schools and organisations.
- Teaching is good overall and much is very good; students benefit from teachers who know their subject well and provide interesting and challenging learning activities.
- Pastoral teams build strong relationships with students and their families that are supportive and promote good learning.
- The school is not tackling weaknesses in literacy skills consistently across the curriculum.
- Provision for students' personal development and citizenship is unsatisfactory.
- A significant minority of students have unsatisfactory attitudes to learning and their behaviour affects learning.

Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. The school has tackled most issues identified in the last report. It has changed its organisation and provision to cater for the rapid increase in student numbers, the changing pattern of student attainment on entry and the increasing numbers of students with difficult and challenging social circumstances. In recent years the revised management team has made good progress in implementing rigorous self-evaluation procedures and monitoring of teaching and learning. Items outstanding from the last report remain the provision of collective worship and support for spiritual development.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	D	D	D	B

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

Overall, achievement in the school is good. Achievement is satisfactory for students in Years 7 to 9 and good for those in Years 10 and 11. Although results in national tests and examinations over the last three years are below the national average, this represents good achievement for most students, who entered the school with well below average standards. Overall girls' standards are higher than boys - in line with the national difference - although this varies by subject. Results in Year 9 English and mathematics dropped in 2003 to well below average but inspection evidence suggests this was because of a temporary staffing problem and standards now are below average. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 in science, ICT, history, design and technology and music. Students with special educational needs and those following the alternative curriculum

achieve well because provision is good. Standards and achievement are hindered by students' poor literacy skills. Students who speak English as an additional language achieve satisfactorily.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are unsatisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory but a significant minority of students display unsatisfactory attitudes to learning and their behaviour is unsatisfactory. This affects the learning of other students and the achievements they make.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall; much is very good in Years 10 and 11 so that students achieve well. Teaching is good in science, design and technology, ICT, history, art, music, physical education and religious education. Teaching is satisfactory in English, mathematics, French and German geography and citizenship. The school has established effective systems to monitor, support and improve teaching and learning, but these have not yet had time to have full effect. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, though good in Years 10 and 11, where provision is particularly enhanced for students with special educational needs and those for whom GCSE courses are too demanding, and this helps them to achieve well. The provision for students' care, welfare and health and safety is good. The support, advice and guidance, based on the monitoring students receive, is satisfactory. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good and governance is satisfactory. The headteacher provides very strong leadership and has developed effective teams throughout the school to promote teaching and learning and raise standards. A particular strength is the determination of senior staff to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of all students. Governors play a key role in planning and monitoring but have not ensured that all statutory responsibilities have been met.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are satisfied with the school. Though the parents' questionnaire showed several areas of concern the number returned was small and may not be a typical representation of the parent body. Parents spoken to during the inspection, and at the parents' meeting, showed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. However, concerns about behaviour were borne out by inspection findings and the school has acknowledged that it needs to do more to involve parents in the work of the school. From questionnaire returns and conversations, students are satisfied with the school overall. Students are pleased by the quality of teaching but are concerned about the behaviour of some students. They reported that they did not feel fairly treated by some staff as they were often reprimanded as a group when a few students were misbehaving.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Implement a whole school policy to improve literacy skills in every subject.
- Improve the planned opportunities for personal development, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the requirements the National Curriculum for citizenship.
- Ensure greater consistency in the management of student behaviour by providing additional teacher training and support.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is good overall; it is satisfactory for students in Years 7 to 9 and good for those in Years 10 and 11. Although results in national tests and examinations over the last three years are below the national average, this represents good achievement for most students, who entered the school with well below average standards. Overall girls' standards are higher than boys', in line with the national difference, although this varies by subject.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 in science, information and communication technology (ICT), history, design and technology (DT) and music.
- The achievement of students with special educational needs is good because of the good quality provision made for them.
- Gifted and talented students achieve well in physical education and performing arts.
- Achievement in French and German in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory because students do not maintain the momentum of improvements from Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

1. In national tests results in 2003, standards at the end of Year 9 were well below average in English, mathematics and science when compared to all schools nationally. In comparison to similar schools based on prior attainment, standards were well below average in English and mathematics and below average in science. These results were not as good as results over the previous three years and reflect considerable staffing difficulties in English and mathematics. In 2002, standards compared with similar schools based on prior attainment were well above average. In other subjects, teachers' assessments in 2003 indicate above average performance in design and technology, history, ICT and physical education and broadly average standards in geography, French and German and music.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	30.3 (32.6)	32.0 (33.3)
Mathematics	32.4 (33.0)	33.8 (34.7)
Science	31.3 (32.1)	32.3 (33.3)

There were 256 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were below average when compared to all schools nationally. Results for five or more grades A*-C were above average for similar schools based on prior attainment. Results were particularly good for those students achieving five or more grades A*-G, which were very high, in the top five per cent nationally, compared with similar schools based on prior attainment. Girls had higher results than boys, in line with the difference nationally. GCSE results for boys are improving in response to the good curriculum provision made for them in Years 10 and 11. These results were broadly in line with the school targets and represent good achievement overall for the students concerned.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	44.4 (44)	52.6 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	92.2 (85)	86.3 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (94)	94.6 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	31.2 (30.7)	34.7 (32.2)

There were 296 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. Although GCSE results were close to the school's targets overall, there were considerable differences in performance between subjects. Results were well above average in history and physical education and above average in ICT because of good teaching and a carefully planned curriculum so that students improved their literacy skills and achieved much better in these subjects than in others. Standards in design and technology varied by course; girls following food studies achieved above average results but the results of boys following resistant materials were below average. However, standards in English and mathematics were well below average and much worse than predicted for the students concerned.
4. Inspection evidence based on lesson observations and analysis of students' work shows that standards are below average overall but improving as students move into GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11. Standards in English and mathematics are better than the 2003 results would indicate and confirm that the fall in standards was temporary and affected by staffing difficulties. Standards in English are well below average by the end of Year 9 but below average in Year 11. Standards in mathematics are broadly average at the end of Years 9 and 11, and in science, standards improve from below average in Year 9 to average in Year 11. Standards in ICT, geography and music also improve noticeably from Year 9 to Year 11 and students achieve very well in history so that standards change from below average in Year 9 to above average in Year 11.
5. Achievement is good overall. It is sound in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Students achieve better in Years 10 and 11 where there are more specialist teachers and where the curriculum has been extended to meet the different interests and aptitudes of students. Improvements in knowledge and understanding are better than might have been expected from students' attainment on entry. Students in Years 10 and 11 had well below average standards when they started at the school and particular weakness in literacy skills, so their current standards represent good achievement. In Years 7 to 9, achievement is at least satisfactory in all National Curriculum subjects except citizenship. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is very good in science, ICT, design and technology, history and music.
6. Students with special educational needs make good progress towards their individual targets and in improving their reading and spelling. They grow in self-esteem and confidence, and many achieve well at GCSE. Achievement in lessons varies. Students with special educational needs achieve well in mathematics, science, design technology, ICT and physical education because work is well matched to their needs. In other subjects, achievement is satisfactory overall, but slower at times because planning does not take enough account of their learning requirements. There are very few students who are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. They achieve in lessons as well as students of the same age when they are well supported. Students following the alternative pathway curriculum in Years 10 and 11 achieve well because the provision is well suited to their needs. The school has not yet formally identified a group of gifted and talented students but inspectors saw some very good achievement by talented students in physical education and music.

7. Improvements in achievement are well supported by the school's detailed procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. This includes the use of test and examination data to set targets for individual and group performance. However, students' weak literacy skills are a barrier to learning in many subjects. When students are in class and well supported by good teaching their achievements are often good but under examination conditions many struggle to show what they know and understand. Overall literacy skills are unsatisfactory. Numeracy and ICT skills are satisfactory overall, but very variable across subjects. For example, students make good use of ICT in languages, science, art, design and technology, physical education and vocational courses but very little use in English, religious education, history and music because of difficulties in access to computer provision.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

How well are students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities developed?

The attitudes of students are unsatisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory, but their behaviour is unsatisfactory. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students behave well but a significant minority have unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour that affects their own and others learning.
- The attendance of students has improved significantly.
- Students do not develop an understanding of personal principles and beliefs.
- Students do not have a sufficient understanding of the wide variety of cultures and faiths represented in Britain and the wider world.
- Many students demonstrate good cultural development through sport or performing arts.

Commentary

8. Students' attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory overall but when stimulated with lively and interesting teaching their attitudes to learning are often good and sometimes very good. Most display a keen interest in their studies and sustain their concentration well. Where teaching is less engaging, and students' interest is allowed to deteriorate, students demonstrate a lack of enthusiasm for their studies with the consequent lack of progress in learning during the lesson. This failure to engage students' attention also leads to incidents of disruptive behaviour that affect the learning of the whole class. There are groups of students who show an indifference to education and the school is working hard to motivate them by, for example, offering them different curriculum options in Years 10 and 11. These are pilot schemes and their success is being monitored closely. Students with special educational needs have positive attitudes towards their learning. They mostly work hard in lessons, concentrate well and are keen to succeed. Some, however, do find it difficult to concentrate and work independently.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2001 to 2002 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.8	School data	0.8
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.

9. Attendance levels are broadly average for all schools and are satisfactory. There has been a significant improvement in attendance levels particularly over the last year. Effective use has been made of a computerised registration system and call home service to monitor attendance

and follow up absences. However, this overall picture masks considerable variations in attendance and some unsatisfactory figures from groups of students. Despite the school's best efforts last year 28 per cent of students had attendance levels below 90 per cent, which significantly affected their overall levels of attainment and ultimate success in external examinations. A significant number of parents condone their child's absence and do not work in partnership with the school to ensure high attendance.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1089	210	0
White – Irish	3	0	0
White – any other White background	8	3	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	7	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	5	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	14	4	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	2	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	4	5	0
No ethnic group recorded	215	54	1

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

10. The behaviour of students is unsatisfactory. Inspectors agree with the concerns expressed by students and parents about behaviour in lessons. The majority of students are well behaved and courteous towards others but there is a significant minority who are not. There is a strong commitment by the school to improving behaviour and new procedures have been introduced this year to raise standards, such as Standards Day at the beginning of each term where students are reminded about the expectations of good behaviour and work. It is too early to see the outcomes of these procedures and the effect they are having on the behaviour of a significant number of students, particularly those in Years 9, 10 and 11. The number of students excluded from the school last year was high compared with all schools nationally. Excellence Cluster funding has been used appropriately to employ student mentors to support students at risk of exclusion and help to remove barriers to learning. Though these mentors were only appointed in September they are already making a difference in students' attitudes towards school and their work.

11. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory. There is no systematic provision or monitoring of these areas of personal development to ensure that they are threaded through the general life of the school and that these important dimensions are made explicit in all departmental planning and practice. Thus, the consistency of students' experiences cannot be assured. The most significant weaknesses are in the areas of spiritual development and in preparing students for life in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society.

12. Students do not develop their personal principles and beliefs, their understanding of themselves and other people because there is such limited provision. Students attend year assemblies once each week; those seen during inspection did not meet the requirements of collective worship. Assemblies do not provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their own spirituality or search for truth. Opportunities to develop moral codes or spiritual awareness within subjects of the curriculum arise spontaneously or as the result of individual initiative; mostly they are missed because teachers do not fully understand what is meant by this aspect of personal development and therefore do not place sufficient emphasis on it.
13. Students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures is very limited. Displays around the school do not fully reflect the diverse cultural heritages of the various communities found in Britain today. A range of stereotypical images of people from the developing world was shown in one assembly, for example, with little awareness of the fact that these were stereotypes. The library contains only a limited sample of books from black or Asian authors. Provision for enrichment and community links, however, is good and this aspect is covered in another section of the report.
14. Students are developing their social skills and some understanding of the responsibilities of living in a community. Students are currently participating in the Romanian Christmas shoebox scheme, for example, and there is a school council that has recently helped to redesign the school uniform and helped to choose the new caterers. However, the range of such opportunities is fairly limited and there are also insufficient opportunities for students to develop their social skills in lessons. The impact of this provision on students' attitudes and behaviour is unsatisfactory – students lack basic social awareness and do not yet fully understand the impact of their actions on others.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good and the curriculum is satisfactory. Care, guidance and support are good and the school benefits from good leadership and management. There are good links with the community and other schools.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good and this helps students to achieve well. There are good systems of assessment to set targets and plan lessons.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons well to make good use of time and resources.
- Lessons are often lively, with pace and enthusiasm that gets students involved in their work.
- Teaching of numeracy and the use of ICT are satisfactory but there is not enough emphasis given to developing literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Teachers have to spend too much time on managing the unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority so that students do not always learn as rapidly as they should.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 132 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1.5%)	32 (24%)	52 (39%)	36 (27%)	7 (5%)	3 (2%)	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.

15. From inspection evidence, teaching is good overall with about one in four lessons being very good. This high quality teaching was seen in most subjects and for students of all ages. Parents and students comments mentioned good teaching in questionnaire responses and in discussions with inspectors.
16. There is proportionally more good teaching in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, where there are a significant number of non-specialist teachers. There are particular strengths in teaching in science, design and technology and ICT. Teaching in English and mathematics is satisfactory, and improving rapidly after a period of difficulty in the recruitment and retention of staff. Across the school good teaching reflects the drive for improving standards and the monitoring and support for teaching and learning by the headteacher and senior staff.
17. Teachers are adept at planning lessons and adapting materials for students with different learning needs, particularly those following the alternative pathway curriculum. However, not all departments have identified students who are higher attaining or gifted and talented, and sometimes teaching does not stretch these students. Students with special educational needs are taught very well in the special needs department, where work is finely tuned to meet their individual learning requirements, and their progress is continually assessed and recorded. The objectives set in students' Statements of Special Educational Needs are fulfilled well and annual reviews are carried out effectively. Relationships are very good and students respond very well to the teachers' high expectations and challenge for them to do well. Students learn well when their learning requirements are well known and met through well chosen tasks and activities, for example in mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, and physical education. In other subjects teaching strategies are not always so effective, especially in ensuring appropriate challenge and match of work. Progress is also slowed in a number of lessons because teachers do not work sufficiently closely with teaching assistants in supporting learning.
18. The best teaching used one-hour lessons to the full; lively starter activities got everyone involved, materials were interesting and teachers explained clearly and posed challenging questions to get students thinking. Very good teaching was seen in practical activities, for example in music, design and technology or physical education, as well as in written or oral tasks in English, history or mathematics. In these lessons students made rapid gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding and often showed good teamwork, enthusiasm and persistence to get their work right. As a result, they achieved very well.
19. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory and meets the needs of different curriculum areas. The use of ICT in teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is used well in some subjects but other areas do not have regular access to ICT equipment, for example in religious education, history or music. The school is planning to extend ICT provision. Teaching of literacy is unsatisfactory because there is no coherent planned provision across the curriculum. Students' basic skills are developed in some subjects such as English, science and physical education but there is no focus on literacy in teaching in other areas, such as geography and mathematics.
20. Teaching and learning are affected by the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a minority of students. There was a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen during the inspection and this was linked to misbehaviour by students not being dealt with effectively or when tasks were not well explained so that students knew what they had to do. They became disinterested and few worked effectively.
21. There are good whole school and departmental strategies to assess students' work and teachers use these consistently. They have detailed information on individuals and groups of students and they use this effectively to set targets and plan lessons. Procedures have a very good effect on students' progress in some subjects such as science and technology. Teachers set challenging targets for individuals and groups. The teachers' records are good and used effectively so that students, and their parents, receive very clear guidance about the standards

attained, concerns the teachers may have and examination or test prospects. The questioning techniques used by the teachers in lessons are good. The students' work is regularly and accurately marked in most subjects and teachers set targets for improvement. Teachers need to be more consistent in evaluating progress at the end of lessons and in ensuring advice for improvement is followed up by students.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. The opportunities for activities beyond the classroom are good. The school has satisfactory accommodation and resources. The school has a much broader curriculum than at the time of the previous inspection to cater for the learning needs of students of a wide range of attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's philosophy of matching courses to students' needs is a real strength.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 offers students a broad range of learning experience that enables them to achieve well.
- The design and technology curriculum is very good for students in Years 7 to 11 because the industry links provide learning relevance and enhance knowledge and experience of manufacturing.
- The development of students' personal education (including citizenship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development) is unsatisfactory because not enough curriculum time is given to it.
- There is inconsistent attention given to supporting students' literacy development through subjects.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

Commentary

22. In Years 7 to 9, all students follow the subjects of the National Curriculum, but students who have very low standards of literacy and numerical skills have additional support in developing basic skills at the expense of studies in French or German. Although some subjects plan to support students' literacy development through curriculum planning others do not, with the result that overall provision is 'patchy' and a significant minority is not achieving well enough. All students follow a course in drama, which helps promote their self-esteem. In addition students have lessons in personal and social education and in careers but insufficient time is given to them so that students are not achieving well on the course. Provision for ICT is good overall but unsatisfactory in music because of inadequate ICT facilities in the subject so students are not receiving their full entitlement. Students are not deprived access to any courses or units of study as a result of individual circumstances or need. The curriculum is better than in recent years with further developments planned that will increase the relevance of learning of students who are not responding to the traditional curriculum.
23. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is well conceived and offers 'routes' that more closely meet the different needs of students in the school. In addition to studies in English, mathematics, science and a choice of GCSE Foundation subjects, students may choose an 'Alternative pathway' that incorporates vocational training opportunities. The provision is good and planning is in hand to extend it further and so enhance opportunity. Work placements, links with business and local schools combined with a range of outdoor pursuits offer exciting opportunities and lead to students achieving well. Some students follow a traditional academic course alongside the alternative curriculum and this is appropriate provision for those who find full GCSE programmes unsuitable for them.

24. Provision for students with special educational needs is carefully planned and is appropriate for their needs. They have full access to the curriculum and, in addition, are withdrawn for specialist support. Emphasis is placed on supporting their literacy needs. Individual programmes of study are regularly evaluated but the balance between withdrawal for specialist help and provision in lessons needs to be reviewed in order to secure continuous improvement. The special arrangements for GCSE examinations meet learning requirements and enable them to achieve well. A few students are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The school receives good specialist support from LEA staff in helping these students. Higher attaining students are well catered for through banding and setting arrangements but the school has not yet formally identified all gifted and talented students in all years. There is a newly appointed coordinator for gifted and talented students and improving provision for them is a school priority.
25. The school's provision for the personal development of students, including health and careers education, is unsatisfactory. Though the programmes of study cover most important aspects that students need to learn there is insufficient time allocated in the timetable to effectively teach it. Staffing is also unsatisfactory in that there is only one full-time teacher and a part-time unqualified teacher allocated to this subject. Other staff, who have free space on their timetables, teach it for this year but may not teach this subject again. A lack of training, and monitoring, inhibits the quality of teaching. In addition, there is no overall planning for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a lost opportunity to plan positively to promote good attitudes to learning and behaviour.
26. Provision for extra-curricular activities and the participation rates of students are good. Within the expressive arts, there are choirs, bands, instrumental groups and concerts. Drama and dance offer a variety of opportunities through clubs and whole school productions; these are well supported by students. Sporting opportunities are good and there is a wide variety of well attended clubs; the school fields a range of sports teams in various competitions. Other popular after-school clubs include; science, computer building, Young Enterprise, and modern languages. Technology activities are wide-ranging; for example, Lego league, aero modelling, jewellery and food club. Students receive good study support through regular homework clubs, 'catch-up' sessions and GCSE examination revision classes. The curriculum is enhanced by outdoor activities camps, field trips and visits to museums, art galleries, exhibitions and battlefields. Students broaden their language, cultural, creative and technical experiences through links with, and visits to, several European countries. The short lunch break is a constraint to provision. More needs to be done to improve information to parents about this extra-curricular provision.
27. Staffing is satisfactory overall with most subjects being taught by well-qualified subject specialists. It is very good in ICT, good in science, design and technology, physical education and art but unsatisfactory in mathematics and citizenship. The school has had difficulties in recruitment of staff in certain subject areas, particularly mathematics, but has been pro-active in the training of new teachers as one method of overcoming this problem and has developed a good relationship with a teacher training institution. The application for Investor in People status is well advanced and is indicative of the care and concern shown towards the staff at the school.
28. Accommodation provides a satisfactory learning environment. The school has made a major investment in refurbishment and extension and the degree of improvement is very good. There are a number of problems such as a lack of soundproofing and the size of rooms that limit the variety of teaching and learning strategies. Inspectors informed the school of some minor health and safety issues that require attention.
29. The level of resources is satisfactory, although in some subjects there are insufficient textbooks so that students have to share in lessons and cannot be issued with books to use independently at home. The learning centre is a useful resource with many helpful and well-

used facilities, including CD-ROM and internet access, but there are insufficient reference books to support learning.

Care, guidance and support

How well are students cared for, guided and supported?

The provision for students' care, welfare and health and safety is good. The support, advice and guidance, based on monitoring, students receive is satisfactory. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good arrangements for termly review and target setting interviews with students.
- Induction arrangements for students coming into the school are good.
- Pastoral teams know their students well.
- Not all teachers make constructive use of tutor time in the mornings.
- There is insufficient time allocated to teach careers and personal, social and health education.
- Student questionnaires revealed significant concerns in some areas.

Commentary

30. The induction arrangements for students coming into the school are good. Pastoral teams stay with their year group throughout their time in school. They are able to build strong relationships with the students and their families that are supportive and promote good learning. This good knowledge of students and their background helps the school to provide support when needed. Students interviewed were confident that they would be able to ask members of staff for help, either academic or personal. There is, however, a lack of constructive use of the morning tutor time in many groups. It is a social time for many and does not settle students ready for lessons. Termly monitoring of students' progress and attainment is good and enables early identification of underachievement. Student performance is discussed at Strategic Panel meetings and additional support is provided, such as being allocated a learning mentor, or attendance at a revision group. Careers guidance is unsatisfactory. Although advice is provided for students from Year 9 to assist them in selecting subjects for GCSE and prepare them for work experience, transition into post 16 education or the world of work, there is insufficient time to effectively teach careers education within the current timetable. This lack of time also affects other aspects of students' personal, social and health education.
31. Students with special educational needs are well cared for, guided and supported. Their learning needs are well known from the time they enter the school, and their progress, and academic and personal development are closely monitored.
32. Senior managers are actively promoting students' involvement in the daily life of the school and this aspect of the school's work is satisfactory. The school council is being encouraged to become more pro-active and involved in the day-to-day life and running of the school. Representatives to both year and school councils are elected by their peers. They have been successful in upgrading toilets recently and are now involved in devising anti-bullying strategies and how victims can be identified and supported. There is a catering committee that negotiates with the providers about menus and prices. Healthy eating options are included in the high quality range of food now offered to students. The layout of the dining areas enables students to sit together at break times and develop their social skills. Students were involved in the design. At "Standards Days" students' views are sought about their perspectives of the school, analysed and fed back to them and form the basis for future agendas.
33. Student questionnaires showed concerns. Eighty five per cent of students were concerned about behaviour in the school, 80 per cent about bullying and 49 per cent about staff not treating them fairly and with respect. During the inspection behaviour was considered to be unsatisfactory, particularly lesson disruption. Students interviewed reported that when bullying is brought to the attention of staff it is usually effectively dealt with. The inconsistencies in

behaviour management amongst staff could lead to students feeling they have been unfairly treated, on occasions they are shouted at or whole classes kept in for detention for the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few. Students also felt that the school rewarded students who had poor behaviour such as those following the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme on the alternative curriculum.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with its parents is satisfactory. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Partnerships with other schools are good.
- Induction arrangements for pupils from primary to secondary school are good.
- Information parents receive about their child's progress and successes is good.
- The views of parents are not systematically canvassed by the school.
- A significant minority of parents do not work in partnership with the school by ensuring that students attend regularly.

Commentary

34. The school's partnership with other schools is good. As part of its specialist technology status effective partnerships have been established with feeder primary schools. Excellence Cluster funding has further developed these links and an effective working partnership now exists between the school and its partner primaries. Pupils from Year 2 use the specialist facilities and expertise of staff, for example, to make wooden bird boxes. Primary pupils have gained national success in the First Lego National Robotic competition supported by the design and technology department. Bridging units are in place in English and science to help pupils make the transition from the primary to secondary phase of education and gifted and talented pupils in Year 5 benefit from workshops given by Dorcan staff in mathematics and science. Students interviewed in Year 7 felt settled and at ease in the school. Arrangements for the transfer of pupils are good. Links with another local secondary school have been supportive and currently they are collaborating on a joint project to link technology and the performing arts.
35. The effectiveness of the school's links with its parents is satisfactory. Though the parents' questionnaire showed several areas of concern the number returned was small and may not be a typical representation of the parent body. Parents spoken to during the inspection, and at the parents' meeting, showed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. However, concerns about the standard of behaviour within the school were borne out by the inspection findings. Parent governors represent the views of parents on the governing body. The Parent and Staff Association support the school at many functions by providing refreshments as well as organising fund-raising events. Their support is valued by the school. Parents benefit from termly meetings with tutors to discuss the progress of their child and to set targets for improvement. Letters to parents celebrate success as well as concerns. The school has developed a website that enables parents to contact the school via email and gain information about the school. Information evenings for parents have recently included drug awareness evenings, which were well attended. However the views of parents about future changes to the school, or the quality of education provided, are not systematically sought at present. Though the school works hard to involve parents in the education of their child a significant minority do not ensure their child attends school on a regular basis. A very close partnership is encouraged with the parents of students with special educational needs. Parents are consulted and kept fully informed about each student's progress and are fully involved in the annual reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs.
36. The school's links with the community are reported on in the 'Community Provision' section of this report.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides very good direction and there is good support from other key staff. Governance is satisfactory; the governing body has many strengths but it does not ensure that all statutory responsibilities are met. There are significant barriers to learning in students' weak literacy skills and some parents do not support the school in making education and attendance a priority.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a shared vision for school improvement and effective planning to put strategies into action.
- There is good subject and pastoral leadership.
- Governors are well informed, well organised and know the school very well.
- There is a very good self-evaluation and monitoring process.
- The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students to help promote spiritual and moral development.
- The management of provision for personal development and citizenship is inadequate to meet the needs of all students.

Commentary

37. The headteacher has been particularly successful in motivating and gaining commitment from staff and governors to improve provision, standards and achievement. This shared belief in improvement is underpinned by an effective strategic plan, good curriculum provision, strong pastoral care and a commitment to meeting the needs of individual students. Leadership strategies encourage staff to be involved in review and development so there is a good sense of ownership of improvements throughout the school. Improvements in provision, particularly the curriculum, teaching and learning and subject leadership, have been rapid since the appointment of the new headteacher. These improvements are all based on the school philosophy of meeting the learning needs of the full range of students. Inspection evidence suggests that these improvements are helping students to achieve well and standards are rising.
38. Senior managers are not complacent, however, and the current school improvement plan contains detailed strategies over a wide range of issues, for example to enhance the curriculum in Years 7 to 9, and to improve students' attitudes and behaviour.
39. Leadership of subject and pastoral teams is good overall and is particularly strong in science, ICT, design and technology and music. Subject directors are good role models for effective teaching and learning and they are doing all the right things to bring about improvements in standards. They provide support and guidance for colleagues and develop effective teams. There are, however, weaknesses in the management of provision for personal, social and health education, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship. Students have very limited time allocated to these areas, which does not enable them to develop the personal skills and knowledge that they need before moving onto the next stage of education or into employment. Pastoral team leaders have recently been redesignated as learning managers and are responsible for monitoring and supporting the achievement of their year group. They work effectively with individuals but there is very little time available each day for tutors to provide support and guidance in a planned programme for the tutor group.
40. The school has a very good cyclic system of monitoring and evaluation because the approach is secure and sustainable in the management system and well supported by the use of information technology. There is a continuous linked process of lesson observation, performance management and department review, whose outcomes lead directly to the school

improvement plan in which all staff are involved, including governors and local education officers. The school monitors both national and school based performance data, reviewing patterns and taking action by, for example, including an alternative curriculum for disaffected and vulnerable students, supporting underachieving areas of the curriculum and providing professional development opportunities for staff.

41. Governors are well informed about the work of the school. They are well organised so that they fulfil their role effectively. They obtain first hand information by visits to the school and links to department. They have developed effective strategies to challenge while providing support for school improvement. Governors have planned improvements and monitored their effects closely since the last inspection report. Financial management is good and many improvements have been made since the last audit report in December 2002. The school is rigorous in its use of best value principles in budget management. It uses additional grants very well in support of the technology college targets. The 2003-4 budget indicates a considerable enhancement of funds available for teaching resources in line with departmental development plans. The governing body has kept up to date with all the required statutory policies but has not ensured that there is a daily act of collective worship for all students. This affects the quality of provision for students' personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
42. Improvement in attainment continues to be hindered by the low attainment of students when they enter the school, and particular weaknesses in literacy skills. This affects their learning across many subjects. Governors and senior staff report that many families have low expectations of what students can do and some do not consider education to be important.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4247960
Total expenditure	4081496
Expenditure per student	3030

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	255299
Balance carried forward to the next	192963

COMMUNITY PROVISION

The quality of community provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The extensive partnership network with other schools, commercial organisation and agencies.
- Very good curriculum links with other European countries.
- The provision of facilities for community use is good.
- Enrichment of the curriculum through visits and external speakers.
- There are few opportunities to develop multi-cultural and multi-faith understanding through the community.

Commentary

43. The headteacher and senior staff ensure that the school fulfils its obligations as a specialist technology college well. Support is given to local schools to improve their provision of science, technology and ICT; for example, students from secondary schools use the CAD CAM facilities at the school-run Hands on Technology Centre at Swindon Pressings. Students make good use of the technology facilities provided and achievement is very good in science, design and technology and ICT in Years 10 and 11.

44. Links with other European countries, through Comenius projects, are very strong, with particular focus on the cultural, creative, lingual and technical dimensions. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's good links with a considerable number of organisations and individuals. Industrial partnerships are good; for example, through Engineering Days and Neighbourhood Engineers. Theatre companies, the police, army, health and other outside agencies contribute to aspects such as bullying, drugs awareness, attendance, careers and health initiatives.
45. The school makes its facilities available to a wide range of local organisations. Provision is made for the adult education service, parent education and family support, parent and child ICT groups and a variety of sports activities. The establishment of a community drama group, using the school's performing arts facilities, is highly successful.
46. Links with the community are not as good as might be expected in preparing students for life in a multi-cultural society as part of the provision to promote students' personal, social and cultural development.

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 **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been a gradual improvement in standards for Year 11 because of more stable staffing and focused planning.
- Standards are below average in Year 11 and well below average in Year 9, particularly in writing.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but good and at times very good in some lessons.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and makes planning effective.
- Students do not have enough access to ICT and therefore opportunities to improve writing are reduced.
- Low literacy levels are a barrier to learning and the school needs to tackle this more effectively.

Commentary

47. Results in Year 9 national tests and GCSE results in 2003 were well below average. Results improved at GCSE, but were worse in Year 9 than in previous years. The trend over the last three years is inconsistent for Year 9 tests but shows improvement in GCSE results. The system of allocating points in Year 9 tests does not fully reflect the serious weaknesses in many students' writing skills. Standards seen during the inspection were also well below average in Year 9. Standards in Year 11, however, have improved to below average because of systematic planning for individual needs. Students achieve satisfactorily overall because teaching and planning are focused on their interests and learning needs. Students with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, make satisfactory achievement because of support and work that is matched closely to their needs. There is sufficient challenge for able students.
48. In lessons, students speak confidently and enthusiastically to each other but are more hesitant and shy when speaking to the class. Listening skills are improving, and students generally pay careful attention to the speaker. Most students can read simple texts accurately, but do not explore deeper levels of meaning in their reading as they do not read enough, and tend to rely on getting the gist of a text rather than paying attention to detail. Writing standards are lower than those in reading, and many students have weaknesses in accuracy and organisation. By Year 11, students can analyse text but their critical thinking is limited, and they find it difficult to support an argument with evidence. Spelling is very weak, and literacy skills are a barrier to learning.
49. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, though it ranges from very good to satisfactory. Teaching is balanced, well thought-out and closely adapted to students' needs. This leads to sound learning and calm, positive relationships. This confirmed comments expressed by some students about their enjoyment of English. The good and very good lessons are characterised by enthusiasm, variety and student involvement. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, the students were enthused and moved by a poignant poem to write and speak evocatively. Similarly, in Year 7, challenging, enthusiastic and focused teaching led to very good learning. Lesson planning and teaching now incorporates strategies for individual students so that their needs may be met. This is leading to better learning and is confirmed by analysis of students' work – most is

well presented and matched to their capability. While the work of the majority of students is marked in good detail, with a balance between the big picture and points of detail, some marking consists of over-enthusiastic praise, with no guidance on how to improve. Partly as a result of this, a minority of students think they are doing much better than they are. Homework is not set consistently and does not extend learning. It does not develop independent research skills because the most common homework is to finish off class work. In a minority of lessons, teachers make effective use of ICT, but this is not consistent. This is because access is limited, the resources are too cumbersome and slow and technical support is insufficient. Consequently, opportunities to improve writing, which is a school concern, are missed.

50. Steps to improve standards have been improved by more stable staffing and systematic planning. The relatively new director of department has established sound leadership and indications are that this will be further improved once strategies start to take effect. Aspects of assessment and unsatisfactory homework procedures are priorities for the department. New schemes of work and teaching and learning initiatives are beginning to take effect and reflect an improving department. There is good co-operation between the English department, the learning centre and teachers responsible for special educational needs. Very good links with the feeder primary schools prepare children very well for secondary school.
51. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although standards are lower they reflect a different group of students whose attainment on entry was well below average and whose socio economic circumstances are much lower. Achievement is still satisfactory. Students' spelling, punctuation and grammar are still weak and reflect low standards in writing when the students entered the school. The school is aware that more needs to be done and improving students' literacy is a priority.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

52. Students' standards in literacy are a barrier to learning and because of staffing problems the momentum of improvements has not been maintained during the last year. The school is aware of this, recognises it as a priority and has planned for more vigorous action. Writing is a weaker area when students come into school, adversely affecting their learning from the start. In departments such as English, history, physical education and science, attempts have been made to improve students' basic skills. The use of writing frames, technical vocabulary, glossaries and focused lesson planning is gradually improving standards. Students extend their vocabulary, speak articulately and improve writing. In other departments such as geography and mathematics, students are not making appropriate progress because their literacy is not a focus of the teaching. It is planned to provide further whole school training after a thorough audit and evaluation to raise the attainment of students in all subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned and include a variety of activities to motivate students.
- Teachers make good use of assessment information from students and tailor their teaching to students' needs.
- Teachers work as a team and support each other well.
- Students' unsatisfactory behaviour means that teachers' energy is diverted and students' learning disrupted.
- Students' progress in Years 10 and 11 does not match that shown in Years 7 to 9.
- Learning support assistants are not deployed effectively to support students.

Commentary

53. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with national expectations for both French and German. Given students' attainment on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. As a result of a determined effort on the teachers' part, the difference between girls' and boys' standards has been eliminated – a significant achievement that runs counter to the national trend. However, in Years 10 and 11, momentum is not maintained; GCSE results for French and German are below average and students do not achieve as well as they should. Only very small numbers reach grades A or A*. Percentages reaching grade G and above are slightly higher than the national average. Standards of work seen during the inspection in French and German are also below average. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory in both French and German. Achievement is affected by some unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of students, weakness in provision and a lack of continuity in teaching staff. Where students with special educational needs are taught in mainstream classes, they are not adequately supported by learning assistants so that they do not progress as well as they should.
54. In lessons seen during the inspection teaching and learning were satisfactory overall for both French and German. The best teaching was observed in Years 7 to 9 in French where it was good or very good, but there was some unsatisfactory teaching in Years 10 and 11 in French. In German, teaching was satisfactory or good throughout. Teachers plan purposeful lessons that cover a balance of the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. They explain things very clearly and make good use of questioning techniques, visual aids, group work, pair work, and competitive games so that students are motivated to learn satisfactorily. They use tape recorders and videos effectively to bring authentic language into the classroom. They regularly use ICT to support learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is more than adequate, even when they teach a language that is not their specialism. They use their languages to good effect to provide a role model for students. However, they sometimes use a mixture of English and the foreign language and uncritically accept poor pronunciation or inaccurate grammar. This reduces the level of challenge, particularly for higher-attaining students. Good use is made of assessment information from students so that teachers plan activities to meet the needs of individuals. Students' work is conscientiously marked and students know how well they are doing and what their targets are. Teachers' comments in students' books, however, do not always show students clearly enough how they can improve.
55. Learning is satisfactory overall in both French and German. Students in Years 7 to 9 make good gains in their knowledge and understanding but this is not maintained in Years 10 and 11. Students' unsatisfactory behaviour around the school spills into lessons: low-level disruption, and sometimes more serious defiance, absorb teachers' energy and interrupt learning. At the last inspection behaviour was generally good in lessons. Now, however, teachers have to work 'against the odds' to create and maintain an appropriate climate for learning in the classroom. Cramped conditions as well as the poor acoustics in some rooms, and noise intrusion from other rooms, mentioned at the last inspection, remain a barrier to more effective learning.
56. The director of languages shows good leadership and leads a committed team. She has a good overview of the department's strengths and weaknesses and there is systematic monitoring of teaching and learning. Schemes of work are clear and are regularly revised and updated. Teachers update their skills and energetically look for opportunities to raise the profile of languages and make language learning attractive. There are, for example, regular visits abroad, email links with foreign schools and an annual 'Languages Variety Show'. Overall improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection. The many good aspects of leadership and management have contributed to raising standards in Years 7 to 9. Despite the school's strenuous efforts, difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff have meant that the lack of continuity, mentioned at the last inspection, has remained a barrier to improvement in Years 10 and 11.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is overall satisfactory with some good features; lesson plans are often detailed and well structured.
- Leadership and management are good; there is clear vision for improvement coupled with effective short-term strategies.
- Assessment procedures and use of collected data are good though students currently are not involved in the assessment process.
- Accommodation is suited but some classrooms are too small for large class numbers and as a result restrict the variety of teaching and learning strategies available to teachers.
- A significant proportion of students are taught by non-specialist teachers.
- Management of poor behaviour is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

57. Results in the Year 9 national tests in 2003 were well below average compared to all schools and similar schools. The results represent a decline in standards compared to the previous year but satisfactory achievement for the students concerned. Boys performed better than girls. Standards in GCSE mathematics in 2003 were well below average. Students' achievement was unsatisfactory and they did not reach the standards they should have. Standards in GCSE statistics were very low compared to the national average. However, current standards of work seen are average for students in Years 7 to 9 and 10 and 11, and students' achievement is satisfactory as a result of new leadership of the department and a changeover of teaching staff. The standard of work by higher-attaining students is above average and students are achieving well.
58. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9, subject specialist teachers' good subject knowledge is evident in their planning, exposition and explanation. Students benefit from initial 'quick-fire' questions linked to the main learning objective as part of the National Numeracy Strategy. Learning objectives, however, are not broken down in order that the end of lesson review provides some understanding to students of how well they have progressed. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good though the poor attitude and behaviour of a significant minority of students in some classes is not managed well. Where teaching is good or better there is a good balance between theory and practice, meeting the needs of all students with opportunities for personal development. Good use is made of 'bite-size' activities to motivate lower-attaining students, engage them in their learning and make progress. However, opportunities for them and average-attaining students to form hypotheses, which are shared through discussion and recorded, are uncommon. Furthermore, key words, statements and conclusions summarising work completed are often not recorded in exercise books, making review and revision difficult. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards and mini-whiteboards as teaching aids, though no whole school use of ICT currently takes place within the department. Good use is made of teaching assistants to support students with special educational needs, who achieve as well as their peers.
59. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall but ranges from unsatisfactory to very good. Teachers have high expectations of higher-attaining students who are appropriately challenged studying GCE AS mathematics alongside their GCSE mathematics course. Some teaching methods are innovative and lead to a high level of interest. For example, Year 11 students displayed good understanding of the rules of algebra when solving quadratic equations by 'completing the square' and used the 'Smartboard' to illustrate graphs of the functions. Similarly, use of the Internet provided lower-attaining Year 10 students with the opportunity to rehearse solving simple linear equations and practise number skills. However, limited teaching methods and resources in a few lessons coupled with a lack

of challenge undermine progress. Poor student behaviour is not managed well. Work is marked up-to-date but more consistency is needed in the use of supportive comments and on-going assessment grades so that students are aware of what to do to improve.

60. Leadership and management are now good; overall standards are improving following a period of very difficult staffing problems that has had a negative impact on standards. Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. There is a clear vision for improvement from the new director of mathematics with short term strategies being implemented, such as the strategic deployment of staff, curriculum initiatives and self-evaluation of the department. Issues raised in the last report have been highlighted and there is a collective commitment to restoring high standards. Procedures for assessment and the analysis of data are good. Clear policies, practices, roles and responsibilities need to be explicit in a department handbook as a benchmark for monitoring and evaluation, together with planned opportunities for sharing good practice and a new differentiated scheme of work that includes ICT and citizenship.

Mathematics across the curriculum

61. The National Numeracy Strategy is used in mathematics lessons, and other departments have systematically planned for the development of numeracy. In design and technology, modern foreign languages, music and science, schemes of work identify what students are likely to know, understand and can do in mathematical terms. There are particular strengths in handling data though number skills are particularly weak with a heavy reliance on the use of the calculator. Overall, the contribution of lessons to mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory though unco-ordinated, with little or no reference to numeracy in schemes of work. Numeracy is included in the school improvement plan though no recent action has occurred to conduct an audit across the curriculum, and monitor and evaluate provision in departments. Teacher training on raising awareness has taken place but the changeover of teaching staff means that more training is now needed. Arrangements for the needs of lower-attaining Year 7 and Year 8 students, particularly those with special educational needs whose prior attainment is Level 2 or below, is underway. Currently students' skills are developed sufficiently in departments to ensure all have full access to the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, leading to good learning.
- There is a shared commitment from a strong team of teachers to the continued raising of standards.
- The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are very good.
- The leadership and management in the department are excellent.
- Exercise books in Years 7 to 9 do not always give a good record of the work of the students.

Commentary

62. In 2003 the results in national tests for students in Year 9 were well below national averages and were below those achieved in 2002. Over the last three years, however, results overall are below average and this represents satisfactory achievement in view of the students' prior attainment. In GCSE examinations in 2003 the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C was the same as the national average and this represents very good achievement for the students, who entered the school with well below average attainment. There is no significant difference at GCSE between the attainment of boys and girls.

63. Standards seen during the inspection were below average in Years 7 to 9 and average in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good overall, with much that is very good in Years 10 and 11. At the end of Year 9 higher attaining students are confident in the use of scientific apparatus, can handle scientific ideas and balance chemical equations. Lower attaining students enjoy their practical work and are able to use scientific terms in their correct context but their written work is hindered by poor literacy skills. By the end of Year 11 higher attaining students have a good grasp of scientific concepts, are capable of presenting an argument in a coherent fashion and apply their numerical skills effectively to the investigational work. Lower attaining students have a good knowledge of those parts of the subject that relate to themselves and are able, for example, to build and understand the working of simple circuits. The low level of literacy skills is supported and guided by the use of appropriate handouts to the students and developed in class by encouraging students to answer questions fully and to express themselves clearly. The positive effect of this is shown by the significantly higher standard of literacy in students in Years 10 and 11. The students make good use of ICT in supporting practical investigations and for research.
64. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well prepared, time and class management are good and the interest of students is maintained by a good variety of activities, particularly including practical work. The objectives for all the lessons are clearly stated by the teachers at the beginning of the session and students know exactly what is expected of them. Students are challenged by the teachers to think, to express themselves clearly in oral work and to aim high. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards in the department to both make presentation more attractive and effective and to involve the students. Teachers and students frequently had very good working relationships and the enthusiasm of the teachers was transmitted to the students leading to good learning and enjoyable and effective lessons. Students with special educational needs make good progress; they are occasionally supported by a teaching assistant and, with the setting system of the department, are given suitable work, which challenges them but is within their capabilities.
65. There were a few instances where students were unwilling to work and this was most noticeable in the few occasions where the pace in lessons was slow and students were not given sufficient stimulus and guidance. The behaviour of a few students was at times poor. The work in class is reinforced by the effective use of homework which is well organised and is marked promptly by the teachers. Teachers mark exercise book regularly but a significant number of students in Years 7 to 9 do not take care with their work and their books do not provide good resources for learning.
66. Since the last report the department has made good improvements to the quality of provision. The accommodation for science has improved significantly. The department is well resourced for both materials and ICT, although textbook resources are inadequate. Leadership and management are excellent; this has enabled students to reach average standards in Years 10 and 11, despite being well below average on entry. There is now a shared determination to continue the raising of standards in Years 7 to 9.
67. Work schemes are thorough and reviewed regularly. There is excellent monitoring of performance data and an excellent system of self-evaluation and this supports the constant drive towards higher standards. The department is developing short-term targets to enable students to achieve the next level of attainment. Links are well established with local primary schools, involving co-operation of teaching staff and visits of Year 6 pupils to Dorcan.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision for ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 leads to above average results and good achievement.

- Potentially higher attaining students are underachieving, due in part to the lack of sufficient lessons in Year 11.
- Assessment is very good and enables teachers to monitor students' progress developmentally.
- The main ICT rooms are too scattered and technical support is not effectively organised.
- Leadership and management are very effective.

Commentary

68. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. At the end of Year 11 they are above average. The 2003 GNVQ results, with the girls doing significantly better than boys, were above average, following a four-year trend, although there was a slight dip in 2003. At the end of Year 9 achievement by students overall is good because they progress from below average standards in ICT on intake to average. They can use most of the customary computer applications readily and easily and have built a sound basis for the more advanced work in Year 10. At the end of Year 11 students' progress leads to above average standards and so achievement there is also good overall. A minority of potentially higher attaining and talented students is underachieving, because teachers need to devote too much of their time to the lower attaining students and those whose behaviour is challenging if not disruptive. In Year 11 this is exacerbated by the lack of sufficient teaching time to meet the demands of the double award course. The alternative pathway scheme in Years 10 and 11 is successful and is having a positive influence on students' personal development. These students are developing higher order skills well, for example using a digital camera to generate images that they then use computer software to manipulate imaginatively and artistically.
69. Teaching and learning are good overall, with much that is very good in Years 10 and 11. In almost half of the lessons seen teaching was very good or excellent. Lesson planning is very good and undertaken in collaboration with the teaching assistant. The level of teachers' subject expertise is very high and consequently explanations and demonstrations are clear and easy to follow, especially as teachers use language effectively and developmentally. They supplement their work with very good resources that support not only students with special educational needs but also the development of literacy generally. Mostly relationships are good, expectations high and work challenging. Students respond well to this high quality provision. They make good gains in their knowledge and in Years 10 and 11, are very good in working independently. Assessment is used extremely well to monitor progress and guide students to achieve their targets. Where teaching is on occasion unsatisfactory, this is because very poor student behaviour diverts the whole of the teacher's time and effort into control.
70. Leadership is excellent, providing a clear vision for the subject, knowledgeable curriculum leadership and ensuring improvements in standards and achievement. There is a very well organised team contributing to the work of the department. Forward planning is clear and there has been very good improvement since the last inspection. There is a focus on raising standards through the extension and centralisation of ICT resources and the restructuring of teaching groups in Years 7 to 9 to promote higher achievement by the potentially higher attaining students. Management is very good. The absence of immediate technical support during and at the start of lessons has an impact on teaching and therefore on learning, particularly as the incidence of machine failure is relatively high.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

71. The wider application of ICT in teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but with considerable variations across subjects. ICT is used very well in technology to design and to make things in metals and plastics and students with special educational needs use specialist applications to extend their literacy and numeracy skills. It is used effectively in art and vocational subjects for research, in physical education for the video analysis of performance and in geography for research and analysis. However, the demand for ICT is much greater than the current level of resources. Teachers of citizenship, English, mathematics and religious education do not have sufficient access to ICT resources and there is no appropriate ICT

equipment in music. Teachers mostly are keen to use the ICT resources and senior staff have recognised the urgency to enhance resources, by the provision of an additional ICT room and purchasing specialist software.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students improve their learning through the use of ICT.
- Students are not given enough help to improve their literacy skills.

Commentary

72. Standards overall are below average but this represents satisfactory achievement for students in Years 7 to 9 and good achievement for those in Years 10 and 11. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were below average and were below the average results achieved in the previous year. Girls achieved higher than boys did at grades A* to C. Standards seen in Years 7 to 9 were below the expected levels, but broadly as expected in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 9 students develop a range of skills in collecting data and presenting it in different ways. They have knowledge of topics from the National Curriculum programmes of study, using terms such as 'plate margins' accurately in studies of earthquakes and volcanoes. Students can relate studies to places and understand why Japan is prone to earthquakes. They can describe physical features but are insecure in explaining the processes that form them. Higher attaining students write clear accounts, but attainment of many is reduced by grammatical inaccuracies and weak expression. By the end of Year 11 students have achieved well and raised standards in organising and researching GCSE coursework. Map and diagrammatic skills, overall, are sound, except for those of the minority of students who do not take enough care with work. Students can relate human activity to landforms but do not explain answers enough in their work.
73. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall; they are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 aims of lessons are clear and teachers make good use of short 'starter' activities that get students quickly into learning mode. Lessons are well planned with opportunities for students to be actively engaged in learning. In Year 7 for example, lower attaining students achieved well in observing, recording and explaining weather around the school site. Resources are well used but they do not always meet the learning needs of students of different attainment. Teachers mark work regularly and include encouraging comments, but not enough is done to help students improve their literacy skills; as a result achievement is below expected standards. Occasionally poor behaviour is not well managed and students do not achieve well in the lesson. By the end of Year 11 students achieve well because specialist teachers teach them. Explanations are clear and careful guidance ensures that they improve understanding of topics. ICT is well used to research coursework and standards are higher as a result. Occasionally not enough is expected of students so that a minority do not show depth of knowledge and understanding of topics.
74. Curriculum leadership and management are satisfactory and the subject has made sound improvement since the last inspection. The recently appointed head of subject has made sound progress in writing new schemes of work and identifying future planning needs. Schemes of work however, are inconsistent in format so that it is not always clear how teachers plan for assessment opportunities and resource requirements. Regular meetings are held with subject staff, but closer monitoring and guidance is required to support less experienced colleagues. Planning to improve students' literacy standards is a high priority for development. The

arrangements to formally assess students' standards and achievement are good and help students to know how to improve. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are lower than previously reported, mainly to a change in the attainment on entry to the school. Good use is now being made of ICT to support teaching and learning.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 leads to students achieving above average standards in GCSE examinations.
- Students achieve well in coursework because of the guidance they receive.
- Weaknesses in grammatical accuracy reduce the achievement of some students.

Commentary

75. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above average with girls doing better than boys at grades A* to C. Results in 2002 were similarly well above average with students doing better than in other subjects. Standards seen during the inspection were average overall but very different between different age groups. Standards were below average in Years 7 to 9 but above average in Years 10 and 11. Achievement overall is good; it is sound in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 9 students can place events in time, such as the succession of Tudor monarchs. They are aware of the nature of evidence and the differences between primary and secondary sources but, many do not analyse information fully enough. Students achieve as well as expected and make gains in range and depth of knowledge of topics. They are knowledgeable about political developments, the nature of trench warfare and why censorship was necessary to achieve victory in the First World War. Although higher attaining students are competent in writing extended answers the majority of students in Years 7 to 9 have weak literacy skills and this affects their overall achievement. In Year 11 many students reach high standards because they have good attitudes to learning and they analyse information and interpret events well. Standards of GCSE coursework are above average because work is detailed and carefully structured. ICT is used to present coursework but not enough use is made of it to research topics.
76. Teaching and learning are good overall; they are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 learning is effective because the aims of lessons are relevant and learning is well structured to provide variety of activity so that students are interested and learn well. Good use is made of resources but there is over-reliance on reprographic materials because of shortages of books and this limits homework opportunities. In the most effective lessons teachers are experts in capturing the interest of students. In a Year 9 lesson about the outbreak of war in 1914 for example, students enthusiastically discussed emotions and ideas about recruitment. The teacher managed learning very well through imaginative questioning and careful monitoring of work. Students were absolutely absorbed and achieved very well as a result. Work is regularly marked but too little attention is given to grammatical accuracy and setting targets for improvement. Although students learn well in lessons, their weak literacy skills mean that they do not always show what they have achieved in knowledge and understanding. In Years 10 and 11 learning is very good because teachers are knowledgeable about the GCSE requirements and are experienced practitioners. Most lessons are effective but occasionally poor attitudes of a minority of students disrupt learning and achievement is reduced.
77. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Clear direction is given about learning expectations and future development needs identified. The annual review of performance is detailed, particularly the monitoring of students' achievements. Good support is given to newly qualified teachers and to non-specialists so that students receive equal opportunities to

achieve. Lesson planning is thorough but more guidance is needed on meeting the needs of different attaining students. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection. GCSE results have substantially improved and standards are higher in Years 10 and 11, but the use of ICT is still underdeveloped and there is not enough fieldwork.

Religious education

The quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and enable students to live up to these.
- Current timetabling arrangements are unsatisfactory because non-specialist teachers change from year to year.
- Resources are insufficient to effectively enhance the curriculum.

Commentary

78. Standards were below average for A*-C grades in the 2003 optional GCSE examination. Standards in terms of A*-G grades, however, were in line with national averages. Standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and continue to be below average at the end of Year 11. This represents good achievement in Years 7 to 9 because students enter the school with well below average knowledge, understanding and skills. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall and students of all abilities make clear gains in their understanding, building on the work they have done previously.
79. Teaching and learning are good overall, especially in those lessons taught by specialists. There is no evidence of unsatisfactory teaching although non-specialist teachers, especially where they only teach small amounts of religious education, do not have the depth of knowledge about different religions. For example in Year 11 the focus becomes moral attitudes in general rather than religious attitudes to various ethical issues. Teaching is well organised and carefully planned so that students understand what they need to do and why. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and students react positively to this in terms of their behaviour and commitment. A particular strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers show high expectations of behaviour and then help students to rise to these. A religious education 'roll of honour', for example, motivates students to try their best in lessons. Tasks are imaginative but challenging; students generally work hard in their lessons and take pride in their achievements. There are however, insufficient resources, particularly religious artefacts and ICT, to enhance the curriculum effectively and give students a wide range of learning experiences.
80. Curriculum leadership is satisfactory. The main constraint is staffing. A small amount of teaching is done by non-specialists who vary from year to year according to space on their timetable. This is unsatisfactory. The second specialist in the department is a newly qualified teacher. This means that the newly appointed director does not yet have sufficient time to strategically develop the subject or to delegate tasks to colleagues. The subject has also suffered in the past from being regarded as not a very high priority and this situation has only recently changed. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The director has a clear vision of how to raise standards and how to improve the subject generally. Management of the subject is good. Procedures are clear, non-bureaucratic and supportive. Monitoring procedures are good. All students now take a short course GCSE in religious education.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE standards are above average in food studies.
- Achievement is very good because of good teaching and a very good curriculum.
- There are very good courses in Years 10 and 11, for example engineering and computer aided designing and making.

Commentary

81. Standards in tests taken in Year 9 in 2003 were above average. GCSE results in 2003 were just below average. However, they were clearly above average in food studies. Results over the past year have improved faster than improvements nationally. Standards in the work seen are above average by the end of Year 9. Standards in Year 11 are already average. The positive trend of improvements is therefore continuing.
82. In Year 9 the students use computers very well to improve electrical circuit designs. Students use technical words like 'struts' and 'ties'. They also have a good understanding of the difference between a design specification and a design brief. They make and evaluate their food products very well. However, they use too few sources of information; neither do they collaborate well together when working in groups. In Year 11 students check and re-check for accuracy when marking out and drilling metal. Also they have good levels of confidence when designing and presenting work with the help of computers. Students have a good understanding of the use of robotics in manufacturing. They thoughtfully discuss the importance of product analysis, product evaluation and market research in designing and making. However, there is too little annotation on their work to show their own thinking about the decisions they have taken independently. They do not comment sufficiently on the quality and reliability of the sources they have used.
83. Achievement is very good overall. It is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. This is because students benefit from good teaching and a very good curriculum. Teachers are very good, energetic role models who teach with enthusiasm. Attitudes are good because the subject has a high profile in the school. Boys and girls are doing equally well. Whilst boys from differing ethnic backgrounds were observed to speak with confidence in food studies, the girls have yet to be attracted to the new engineering course. Boys and girls are justifiably proud of their quality products such as decorative hats, clocks and muffins.
84. Teaching and learning are good overall and in Years 7 to 9. Teachers have sufficiently high expectations and very good management skills to maintain a fast pace. Occasionally the students' response was unsatisfactory because they were not given the skills they needed to succeed and lost interest. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' high quality demonstrations made the students proud of the metal locking devices they had made. Very good explanations of GCSE examining procedures, by the teacher, built very well the confidence of the students in their capability to succeed. Good teaching was always well focused and enabled students to give thoughtful answers before the end of the lesson. Assessment procedures are very good overall. Occasionally opportunities for students to demonstrate what they had gained were too limited. However, marked course work shows that teachers use increasingly more effective methods to make the next step in the learning most appropriate for the individual student.

85. Leadership and management are very good. Curriculum provision has been considerably enhanced. The engineering course in Years 10 and 11 includes working with industrial partners off site in a genuine industrial context. This provision is very good and provides considerable motivation for the students concerned. The priorities for development are very good. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There are very good opportunities for professional and curriculum development. Links with other schools and with teacher training organisations are very good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Assessment is thorough in Years 10 and 11 and the support given matches students' needs and leads to good achievement.
- Students make good use of sketch books for research and development in Years 10 and 11.
- Students do not experience work in ceramics and this limits three-dimensional experience in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

86. Standards in the current Year 9 are broadly average. This represents satisfactory achievement for many students in relation to their knowledge, understanding and skills when they entered the school, which were below average. Lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress. These standards are achieved because students are supported well and apply themselves purposefully to their work. Students of all abilities are able to observe from direct observation and use line and tone effectively in their drawings.
87. The proportion of students gaining higher grades A* - C in GCSE examinations in 2003 was well below the national average. However, during the inspection standards seen in the current Year 11 are much improved on this and are broadly average. This represents good achievement over the two years of the course for the majority of students. Achievement of middle and higher attaining students in Year 10 is good with students demonstrating personal interests, ideas and responses to project briefs. Sketchbooks are used effectively and technical language develops well. Students develop and sustain a chosen theme in their work and are able to show some influence of important movements in art and design or of particular artists. Students with special educational needs achieve well and benefit from individual attention.
88. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Good lessons are characterised by a good pace of work and a variety of activities that maintain students' interest. When students were actively engaged in debate about their work and clear about their immediate learning objectives, their responses were positive. Where tasks were less challenging, or lacking in pace, some students became restless. The full potential of ICT as a learning aid has not yet been fully developed. In Years 7 to 9, students would learn better if practical examples of learning objectives, based on national expectations, were shared with them. Such objectives would also help end of year assessments to be more realistic. In Years 10 and 11 however, teachers combine good assessment procedures with individual help for students and this encourages their achievements, as they know what they have to do to improve. Limits of continuity in curriculum time restrict the range of media experiences in Year 9 and this has an adverse effect on teaching and learning. For example, there is insufficient use made of working with clay for three-dimensional study.

89. The leadership and management of art and design are good. Strategies for raising standards at GCSE are now being implemented and are having a positive impact in Year 10. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, most notably in Years 10 and 11, where project briefs are now more structured to give clear focus to the students' work. Theory and practical work are integrated effectively. Extra-curricular activities and visits to galleries and museums have a positive effect upon the quality and range of students' work. The present lack of technical support inhibits the full potential of three-dimensional experience being developed.

PERFORMING ARTS

This new faculty for music and drama was set up two years ago. During the inspection, music was inspected fully; drama was sampled.

90. The teaching of **drama** is an asset to the school curriculum. The director of performing arts has developed both learning in lessons and provided a very good contribution to extra-curricular activities. Two lessons were seen during the inspection, in both of which teaching and learning were good. The teaching of drama helps to improve standards because students are able to transfer the skills they have learned into other subject areas. Teaching staff are committed to the subject and emphasise decision-making skills, and provide opportunities for students to think for themselves. Students learn well overall because the lessons are well prepared and they enjoy the subject. Emphasis on varied activities, personal development and collaborative work enhances the enjoyment and motivation of students. In a Year 11 lesson, dramatic rehearsals were professional, carefully planned and executed, and skilful. This was because of the high expectations of the teacher and carefully targeted lesson planning. Very good relationships create an atmosphere of achievement and respect.
91. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contributes to the positive ethos of the school. In the prestigious school production, staff and a large number of students work with many departments, which encourages collaboration in different disciplines and develops relationships.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall.
- Students achieve very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Attitudes to the subject are improving and numbers involved in option courses, instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities are increasing. A minority of students in Year 9 disturb lessons with challenging behaviour and slow the pace of learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Students in Years 7 to 9 have no opportunities to develop skills in music technology.

Commentary

92. Standards and achievement vary across Years 7 to 9; overall standards are broadly average for most at the end of Year 9. In Year 7 students develop keyboard skills and understanding of the musical elements. By Year 8, standards in ensemble playing are broadly average and students are developing skills in improvising. Students in Years 7 to 9 do not have opportunities to develop skills in music technology and this limits their composition work. Students' skills are below average on entry to the school and some have a limited musical experience. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall for students of all levels of ability.

93. At the end of Year 11, the GCSE results last year were just below the national average. Work heard in the inspection is in line with national average standards in performing and composing and numbers opting for music have doubled. Performances are accurate and musical understanding of the chosen styles is evident. Ensemble skills are good. Students compose in a variety of styles including minimalism, songs and a piano duet. They demonstrate good understanding of melody, harmony and rhythm and create satisfactory structures. A few achieve above the standard in practical skills. Listening skills are satisfactory for most. Achievement is very good overall as these students' skills were well below average on entry to the school.
94. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the best lessons lively, encouraging and good-humoured teaching ensures that students work hard and with enthusiasm. Students enjoy these lessons; they develop confidence; behaviour and attitudes are good. Lessons move forward at a very good pace through a variety of tasks and explanations are clear. Questioning is well used to consolidate knowledge. In lessons where a minority of students indulge in background chatter or challenging behaviour, teachers work hard to patiently encourage these students but this behaviour does slow the pace of learning overall.
95. The director of the performing arts faculty has a very clear sense of direction for the subject and leadership and management are very good overall. A new curriculum has been designed for Years 7 to 9. The scheme is broad based and world music is particularly well developed. In Years 10 and 11 the faculty offers a GCSE music option and also an expressive arts course. A good assessment scheme is in place and carefully used to monitor progress. Students are aware of their standards of work and how to improve. Attitudes to the subject have improved and numbers involved in option courses, instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities are growing. The faculty arranges many concerts and shows.
96. The department has moved into new, re-designed accommodation this year. Lack of resources for music technology is a major weakness. The need for computers and appropriate software was highlighted in the previous report but the school has not yet acted on this and it is having an adverse effect on the development of composing skills. However, overall improvement since the last inspection is good. With the new accommodation – and the necessary resources for music technology in place – the faculty will be well poised to move even further forward.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good; teachers plan lessons using a range of activities that allows all groups of students to learn well.
- Achievement is good across all years.
- The extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all students to extend their learning.
- Curricular links with partner primary schools are underdeveloped.
- The teaching of GCSE theory work lacks the enhancement of a subject specific classroom.

Commentary

97. Standards in lessons and work seen of Year 9 and Year 11 students match national expectations and show good improvement from their work in previous years; most students are achieving well. Year 11 students' results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above the national average. They achieve better pass grades than those in their other subjects. Standards, overall, are rising faster than the national rate of improvement. Students with special educational needs and the talented achieve well. Higher-attaining students are successful in a range of sports at district, county and sometimes national levels.

98. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. Teaching is well planned, varied and challenging, because it consolidates and extends students' knowledge and skills through a range of activities and by effective questioning; consequently, students are well focused and lessons proceed at pace. Work is planned to suit all students. For example, in a Year 7 rugby lesson, lower-attaining students made good progress because the teacher modified tasks, simplified rules and used demonstrations. The learning of higher-attaining students, including the talented, is accelerated by extension tasks, grouping and good extra-curricular provision. Learning is enhanced by very good specialist accommodation in all areas of the curriculum, except for the lack of a subject specific teaching base in GCSE theory lessons. Teachers provide opportunities for independent learning in most lessons. In Year 9 gymnastics, students plan work, evaluate peer performance and perform to an audience. Learning is less effective in the few lessons where teaching is more prescriptive and students are given fewer opportunities to explore their own ideas.
99. Students' learning is enhanced by their positive attitudes. A small minority, however, do underachieve because of poor concentration and irregular participation. Most students, across all years, improve their numerical skills through opportunities to score, measure and record performance. Teachers emphasise key words and are adept in their use of questioning. These approaches improve the technical vocabulary, speaking skills and listening ability of students across the attainment levels. The subject makes good provision for students to develop their ICT skills; for example, GCSE written assignments are often enhanced by the use of ICT.
100. Leadership and management are good. The subject director is ably supported by a dedicated team of specialist teachers. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and students' standards. Assessment systems are good and are used well to monitor students' progress and set targets; however, curricular links with partner primary schools are underdeveloped. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards of attainment are better; the quality of teaching has risen to good; achievement is higher and leadership and management are now good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The alternative pathway curriculum

Provision in the alternative pathway is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision is very flexible and includes ICT, the development of key skills, school links and work placements.
- Students have good attitudes to their work and they behave well.
- Teaching and learning are good with a strong focus on independent learning.
- Provision is focused on lower attaining students and those with special educational needs and this affects students' perceptions about vocational education.
- Irregular attendance affects the achievement of some students, despite the good teaching.

Commentary

101. Students following the alternative pathway take a range of accredited courses, for example the ASDAN scheme or the Duke of Edinburgh Awards to Gold level. Their achievements are sound overall. Literacy and numeracy standards are well below the national average but students are developing sound ICT skills. Those with special educational needs achieve well. However, not all students attend regularly and this affects the continuity of their learning and they do not achieve as well as they should.

102. Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from well-planned lessons, carefully devised to support the learning of students with different needs. Key features are a brisk pace and involving students in the management and use of ICT. This really motivates them to get involved and hence improves their learning. There is a key focus on student self-reliance and independence.
103. Leadership and management of this alternative provision are good. The flexibility of provision and careful management of activities, in the school and off site, is well managed. Staff have a clear vision of how to improve provision and meet the needs of a greater proportion of students. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

The quality of provision is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has yet to fully implement the requirements of National Curriculum for citizenship, although a start has been made to introduce the subject.
- Insufficient time is allocated to teaching citizenship. This means that students' long-term achievements are unsatisfactory, even though they often make good progress within individual lessons.
- Because teaching time is inadequate, the impact of the school's personal development programme on students' overall behaviour and attitudes is unsatisfactory.
- Teaching is satisfactory with many good features. Most students enjoy their lessons and are prepared to work hard.
- The citizenship team is hard working and committed to raising standards in the subject.

Commentary

104. The school has a timetabled subject for all students called personal development. This seeks to cover personal, social and health education (PSHE), careers and National Curriculum citizenship. This is taught in one lesson every two weeks. Allocation of time, therefore, seriously constrains development of this subject. It is not possible to teach effectively the three strands of the subject in sufficient breadth or depth under the current arrangements. Delivery is also dependent on teachers' familiarity and confidence with this new National Curriculum subject. Although many of the lessons are taught by an experienced and stable team, a small proportion is taught by non-specialists who vary from year to year depending on the timetable. This impacts on the quality of teaching and learning and also means that the teacher in charge cannot effectively train, support or monitor their work.
105. Standards of work in citizenship are below average. Inadequate allocation of time means that students' achievement over time is unsatisfactory. Students are not taught systematically, to sufficient depth, and topics are not linked sufficiently across the three strands. However, students do make clear, often good, progress within individual lessons.
106. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some good features. However, there are some concerns with non-specialist staff who teach only small amounts of citizenship. One poor lesson was observed, for example, where bad behaviour was insufficiently managed or challenged by the teacher. But most lessons have clear aims and objectives and provide students with good opportunities to work in pairs or groups. Occasionally, however, the teaching relies too heavily on telling students things rather than on students identifying issues, researching them and producing their own conclusions and solutions themselves. Teachers are enthusiastic and make good use of relevant examples to illustrate what they are saying.

This means that students are able to build up their knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a citizen in today's society. In almost all instances, they show interest in what they are doing and are able to share opinions in an atmosphere of tolerance. Almost all teachers are skilled in setting high expectations of behaviour and work and, in almost all lessons seen, students are prepared to work hard and follow the rules. A significant number, however, find difficulty with listening attentively and teachers have to work hard to teach them the importance of doing this.

107. Leadership is currently unsatisfactory. This is largely because there is insufficient time allocated to the subject. Although the teacher in charge of citizenship has a clear vision of what needs to be done, the subject cannot be developed further if students receive only one lesson per fortnight, which has to be shared with personal, social and health education and careers education. Management is satisfactory, however. Clear progress has been made with the introduction of the subject. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic and have worked hard to develop an interesting programme of relevance to students. The co-ordinator has begun an audit of other subjects to map their contributions to the subject and the groundwork has been laid to begin assessing students' work at the end of Years 9 and 11. Citizenship was not a separate National Curriculum subject at the time of the last inspection. The position of this new subject is similar to that found in many schools and colleges at present. Accordingly, procedures for monitoring and evaluation are in very early stages.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	4
How inclusive the school is	4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	4
Overall standards achieved	3
Students' achievement	3
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	5
Attendance	4
Attitudes	5
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	5
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	5
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well students learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for students	4
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	4
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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