

INSPECTION REPORT

GABLE HALL SCHOOL

Stanford-le-Hope

LEA area: Thurrock

Unique reference number: 115355

Headteacher: Mr J King

Lead inspector: Mrs S D Morgan

Dates of inspection: 19th – 23rd January 2004

Inspection number: 258636

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1236
School address:	Southend Road Corringham Stanford-le-Hope
Postcode:	SS17 8JT
Telephone number:	01375 400800
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Read
Date of previous inspection:	April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Gable Hall is a large comprehensive Foundation school. It has 1236 pupils on roll in Years 7 to 11. There are similar numbers of boys and girls, although the proportion varies between year groups. The school takes its pupils from the local area which has a mixture of privately owned and social housing. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry is average. The percentage of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, at almost seven per cent, is below the national average. Almost nine per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, a below average proportion. These pupils have a range of needs, with most having learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average. Almost all pupils are white British, with small numbers from a range of other ethnic groups. No pupils speak English as an additional language.

Gable Hall has Arts College status and has developed a range of community provision. The school is popular with parents and is oversubscribed. It has received a number of awards, including the DfES Achievement Award, Artsmark and Sportsmark Gold and has gained Investors in People status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1355	Mrs S D Morgan	Lead inspector	
9569	Mrs J Leaning	Lay inspector	
33244	Mrs R Chambers	Team inspector	English
25778	Mr A Hicks	Team inspector	Mathematics
3242	Dr M Newman	Team inspector	Science
32231	Mr A Lyons	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT), citizenship
24142	Mrs S Argyle	Team inspector	Art and design
2495	Mr B Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology, vocational education Years 10-11
18663	Mr P Burchell	Team inspector	Geography, history
31682	Ms A Storey	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
20767	Mr J Royle	Team inspector	Music
4475	Mr K Remnant	Team inspector	Physical education
10761	Dr P Willan	Team inspector	Religious education, special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Gable Hall is a very good school with many outstanding features. The school has an excellent caring ethos which values each individual and encourages every pupil to achieve their best. Pupils are very proud of their school and parents are very supportive. Standards are well above average and have shown continued improvement. Teaching is very good and pupils achieve very well. The leadership and management of the school are excellent. Staff are committed and work as a team towards further improvement. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- GCSE results have shown continued improvement. In 2003 they were well above the national average and very high in relation to similar schools.
- Teaching is very good, with particular strengths in Years 10 and 11, and pupils achieve very well.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, very well supported by senior staff and governors, has led to very good improvement in teaching and learning and achievement.
- An excellent caring ethos in which pupils feel valued and are motivated to achieve their best in all that they do.
- Outstanding links with the local and wider community.
- The school has experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining teaching staff in some subject areas. It continues to work very hard to overcome these problems and has been successful in appointing and inducting new staff although a few vacancies remain.

Very good improvement has been made by the school since the last inspection. Although no significant weaknesses were identified in the previous inspection report the school has worked tirelessly to improve all aspects of its work. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. This has led to a continued improvement in standards and the school being placed in the top 100 most improving schools for the last three years. All in the school community share a total commitment to further improvement.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve very well throughout the school.

Standards have risen in Year 9 tests at a rate faster than that seen nationally. In 2003, pupils achieved better than might have been expected in relation to their previous results in English and much better in mathematics. Pupils achieved as well as expected in science. Science results were not as good as those in English and mathematics due to significant staffing difficulties faced by the department. Current standards show continued improvement and are well above average in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics.

GCSE results have continued to improve at a rate faster than that seen nationally. They are well above the national average and very high (in the top five per cent) when compared with those of similar schools. Current standards are similar and pupils achieve very well overall. In 2003, pupils achieved very much better than might have been expected in relation to their previous results. Inspection evidence showed excellent achievement in geography, French and German. Pupils following vocational courses achieve very well.

Pupils are very proud of their school. Their attitudes, values and behaviour are very good, as is their attendance. Pupils are very punctual to school and to lessons. They are supported by the school's excellent ethos, with a resolute focus on achievement which includes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school is providing a very good education for its pupils.

The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with particular strengths in Years 10 and 11. The high level of good and very good teaching is a major factor in pupils' very good achievement. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare pupils very well for examinations. Teaching was at least good in all subjects, and very good in a large number, including English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers use a range of teaching techniques and plan interesting work which engages pupils' interest. They have high expectations of what pupils will achieve. A particular strength is both teachers' and pupils' very good use of time. Lessons start promptly and the work to be completed is discussed, so that pupils are clear about what they are going to learn. In a very few lessons work was too prescriptive and did not provide enough opportunities for pupils to think for themselves. Assessment procedures are very good and the information gathered is used very effectively to help teachers plan future work and to let pupils know what they have to do to improve.

The curriculum is very good and the introduction of "fast-track" groups and vocational courses is helping to meet the needs of all pupils. Very good arrangements are in place for pupils' pastoral guidance and support and the school has a very good partnership with parents. Excellent links have been developed with the community and with other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. Leadership is characterised by a drive for achievement, through imaginative teaching and learning, which has kept Gable Hall in the top 100 most improved schools for three years running. It has been able to overcome staffing shortage via the reputation of the school in the community and the detailed and careful training and induction of new staff. It has created an atmosphere in the school where it is "cool" to learn and "cool" for both boys and girls to participate in performance. Governance of the school is very good and all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are supportive of the work of the school and the vast majority are overwhelmingly positive about what it offers. Pupils are very appreciative of the opportunities provided by the school and the quality of the teaching they receive. In the questionnaire responses they all said they were expected to work hard and do their best!

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

No major areas for improvement were identified by the inspection team. However, the school should continue its efforts to deal with the problem of recruiting and retaining staff in some subject areas.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Both in national tests at the end of Year 9, and GCSE examinations, results have improved at a rate faster than that seen nationally. The school has been placed in the top 100 most improving schools based on sustained improvement in GCSE examinations for the last three years. Pupils' attainment on entry is average. Their achievements are **very good** throughout the school and standards are generally well above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards show continued improvement and are well above average in many subjects.
- The most recent GCSE results were well above the national average.
- Pupils achieve very well throughout the school.
- Pupils' achievements are excellent in geography throughout the school, and in French and German in Years 10 and 11.
- Staffing difficulties in some subjects have acted as a barrier to pupils' progress.

Commentary

1. Results in the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, were above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Overall, results were well above those of similar schools. Pupils made the most progress in mathematics, where standards were well above those of similar schools. In English, they were above those of similar schools. Science results were in line with those of similar schools. They were not as good as those in mathematics and English due to significant staffing difficulties faced by the department. The performance of boys and girls is broadly similar. Current standards show continued improvement and are well above average in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils achieve very well overall. This is because work is very well planned to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.0 (34.4)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.5 (36.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.5 (33.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 252 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. GCSE results are well above the national average. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A*-C grades was well above average. A very high proportion (in the top five per cent nationally) gained five or more A*-G grades and one or more A* - G grades. The results show continued improvement in many subjects. Pupils achieved exceptionally well in relation to their performance in national tests at the end of Year 9. Current standards are similar and pupils achieve very well overall. Standards are well above average in a number of subjects including English, mathematics and ICT. Pupils' achievements are excellent in geography, French and German. Pupils following vocational courses achieve very well. In religious education pupils following the short course achieve satisfactorily. This is due to recent staffing difficulties which have now been resolved.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	82 (74)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	43.0 (34.7)	39.5 (34.7)

There were 238 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In line with the school's inclusion emphasis, pupils with special educational needs are taught in mainstream classes and make very good progress along with their peers. A very high percentage of these pupils achieve at least five GCSEs by the end of Year 11. Pupils in the small withdrawal groups were seen to achieve very well in their "spelling recovery" class.

4. The school provides many good opportunities for gifted and talented pupils, including several "fast-track" GCSE arrangements. In these, pupils' attainment is high and they make rapid progress.

5. The school has been successful in developing a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy. Strong emphasis is placed on the development of pupils' literacy skills in all subjects. As they progress through the school these are developed consistently. Overall, standards are well above average and support pupils' learning very well. Pupils' competence in mathematics is developed very well as they progress through the school. It is well above average and supports their learning in other subjects very well. Pupils ICT skills are developed very well throughout the school. They use a range of ICT applications with confidence. This supports their work in other subjects very well.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour are **very good**. Attendance is very good Pupils are very punctual to school and to lessons. They are supported by the school's very strong ethos and excellent provision for pupils' moral development together with very good provision for their spiritual, social and cultural development.

Main strengths

- Very good attitudes and behaviour and excellent relationships make an important contribution to pupils' learning.
- Pupils are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities available to them.
- Very well ordered lunch breaks, very good attitudes and mature discussion in tutor group sessions and assemblies support pupils' social and moral development.
- Pupils understand the importance of regular attendance.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.8	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

6. Pupils are very enthusiastic about school, they are polite, self-confident, friendly and very mature. All pupils are highly and equally valued and are willing to contribute their ideas without fear of ridicule or failure. A strong sense of community, high expectations and excellent and very carefully fostered relationships engender respect for each pupil and adult. Spiritual and moral development is

planned for extensively across the curriculum and makes a very positive contribution to pupils' achievements both in lessons and in out of school activities.

7. Excellent provision for pupils' moral development together with very good provision for their social development is reflected in the very good behaviour around the school. This is underpinned by the clear behaviour policy, which is fairly and consistently applied and by constant praise and recognition. Pupils in the upper school take part in a programme to help younger pupils with reading and this is clearly beneficial to both. Very good use is made of the learning resource centre, which is open all the time. Pupils take part in the very broad range of extra-curricular activities available to them and this enhances learning opportunities very well. One pupil said 'because of the longer day I can do six activities!' The school council is made up of members of year councils; pupils say that it offers a genuine opportunity for their ideas to be heard. Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is very good. They study major world faiths and a diverse range of cultures through music, art, dance and theatre; they also experience different customs such as Hanukkah as part of the Jewish festival.

8. Lunchtimes and break are very orderly occasions, pupils mix happily together in a very sociable atmosphere and no one is left out. Tutor time is used very well to support moral and social development. Each week there is a theme and during the inspection pupils were finding out about Martin Luther King. Debate was very mature with very good opportunities for reflection built in. Assemblies are very well planned and successfully extend the weekly theme; pupils concentrate and are interested. Pupils raise funds for charity. In one year group pupils have raised a substantial amount towards buying a wheelchair for a local child. Many visits and visitors ensure that pupils benefit from a range of experiences that support their achievement very well.

9. Pupils are very keen to come to school so they attend regularly and on time. Parents are aware of the very high expectations and the rigorous monitoring of absence. The very close attention to and follow up of absences are leading to further improvement. There are still parents who take their children on holiday during the school term but the school actively discourages this. The exclusion figures in the table reflect the school's clear intention to operate a 'zero tolerance' approach to unacceptable behaviour and each exclusion has been for a fixed period of one day.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

Exclusions in the last school year

No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1148	53	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Teaching and learning are very good as is the curriculum. The quality of accommodation and learning resources is good. Very good arrangements are in place for pupils' pastoral guidance and support and the school has a very good partnership with parents. Excellent links have been developed with the community and with other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Assessment procedures are very effective and give pupils a clear understanding of how they can improve the standard of their work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare pupils very well for examinations.
- Both teachers and pupils make very good use of the time available.
- Teachers set challenging work and have very high expectations of what all pupils will achieve.
- Lessons are very well planned and teachers use a range of teaching techniques and resources to develop pupils' knowledge and skills.
- Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.
- Assessment procedures are very good and parents and all in the school community know how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- In a few lessons, the pace is too slow and in one or two others, the work is not demanding enough for the highest-attaining pupils.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in [number] lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6(4%)	56 (41%)	54(39 %)	19(14%)	2(1%)	1(1%)	0 (0%)

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

Commentary

10. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. The percentage of satisfactory or better teaching has increased from 92 per cent to 98 per cent. Over four fifths of the teaching was graded as good or better and over two fifths very good or excellent. The best teaching was seen in Years 9 to 11 where all lessons were satisfactory or better. Teaching was consistently good even though a number of staff were new to the school. The school has faced staffing difficulties in a number of subject areas. It has made considerable efforts to recruit suitable staff and has been very successful in limiting the effect of staff changes on pupils' learning. The high level of good and very good teaching is a major factor in pupils' very good achievement.

11. Pupils were very positive about the quality of teaching they receive. In questionnaire responses and discussions, both pupils and parents expressed the view that staff had high expectations and that teaching was good. Overall, teaching was at least good, in all subjects. It was very good in a large number, including English, mathematics and ICT.

12. Teachers have good subject knowledge and prepare pupils very well for examinations. They clearly convey to pupils what is required for examination success and plan their lessons very carefully. A range of teaching techniques, such as the use of drama, paired work and discussion, is used to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding and pupils respond very positively. For example, in a Year 7 history lesson on the Roman Republic the teacher used drama to very good effect. Pupils acted out the principles on which the Republic was based. This activity engaged their interest and by the end of the lesson their understanding of the major concepts was very good. In many lessons teachers make very good use of ICT resources to present new ideas. For example, in

a Year 10 French lesson the teacher used a colourful Power-Point presentation to develop pupils' understanding of the past tense. The enthusiasm of the teacher, coupled with a range of short activities carried out at a fast pace engaged pupils' interest. Work was meticulously planned and provided an excellent range of opportunities for pupils to practise their language skills. Pupils listened carefully and were keen to "have a go" at all the tasks set. Their interest was maintained throughout the lesson and by the end they had made very good progress.

13. A particular strength is both teachers' and pupils' very good use of time. Pupils arrive on time to lessons and are ready to work so lessons start promptly. The work to be completed is discussed, so that pupils are clear about what they will be doing and what they are going to learn. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson on newspaper writing, the lesson objectives were discussed and the teacher carefully questioned pupils to check their understanding before group work started. Pupils were told of the time allowed for each activity. This ensured that they worked to capacity, shared tasks and learned from each other. During the lesson pupils analysed a centre page from a tabloid paper. Pupils were given thinking time before each group fed back to the class. Very skilful management by the teacher ensured that all pupils contributed and any generalisations were challenged. Pupils listened to each other carefully and valued the contributions of others.

14. Teachers set challenging work and have very high expectations of what pupils will achieve. In the most effective lessons teachers are enthusiastic and make the work interesting. In a high-attaining Year 11 mathematics class the teacher set a challenging starter activity. Whilst key features were discussed and explained pupils were encouraged to explore ideas and think for themselves. Pupils relished the challenge. When it was required very good support and feedback was given by the teacher. Pupils were fully involved for the whole lesson and a lively discussion session at the end showed that pupils' understanding had been developed very well. In a Year 11 science lesson on DNA the teacher set additional challenges to pupils after the starter activity through the use of careful questioning during a discussion session. The questions required pupils to apply the knowledge they had gained and think for themselves. A range of practical activities, which were both interesting and thought provoking, maintained pupils' interest throughout. These together with clear explanations from the teacher led to pupils' learning very well.

15. Very good working relationships promote pupils' learning effectively. A culture of mutual respect exists and in many lessons teachers use humour to good effect. Pupils are very supportive of one another, for example in a Year 11 ICT class pupils offered each other advice and encouragement and analysed each others work. Throughout the school, teachers set appropriate homework to support pupils' learning. Staff show real commitment to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, if pupils have problems with their science homework they can e-mail the department before 8.00pm and receive an answer to their query the same day.

16. Satisfactory lessons had some of the features of good and very good lessons. However, in these lessons time was not used as effectively and work was not challenging enough for the highest-attainers. In other lessons work was too prescriptive and did not provide sufficient opportunity for pupils to think for themselves. In the very few lessons that were unsatisfactory teachers did not always share learning objectives with pupils but launched straight into individual work. This resulted in pupils not fully understanding what they should do, becoming confused and wasting too much time.

17. Pupils are placed in ability sets and this has proved very effective in raising standards. Teachers know their pupils well. They adopt strategies and set targets that they know are appropriate for all pupils including those identified with special educational needs. On many occasions, inspectors observed very skilful and sensitive management of classes. When learning support assistants are present in lessons, they work very well with subject teachers to ensure pupils make good progress. They are valued by pupils and staff. On the few occasions that pupils are withdrawn for short periods of time to improve reading and spelling, specialist teaching and learning support staff enable pupils to make very good progress with these skills.

18. Assessment procedures are very good. Examination and other test data are analysed and used rigorously to promote ever-rising standards. Regular feedback to pupils, teachers and parents ensures that all in the school community know how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Assessment in physical education is excellent. Pupils routinely evaluate their own work and set their own targets for improvement. Record keeping is meticulous. In design and technology, teachers' assessments in Years 7 to 9 are not accurate. Consequently some teachers do not always plan demanding enough work, which limits pupils' short-term progress and achievement.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is **very good**. It is organised with great flexibility to meet the needs of all pupils and provides very good opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation and learning resources are **good**.

Main strengths

- The curriculum offers a wide choice of courses and subjects. It is successfully innovative and constantly developing and meets the needs of pupils very well.
- Arts College status has contributed to raising standards and its positive impact affects the whole curriculum.
- The choice of extra-curricular activities is extensive and valued by pupils.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the transition to further education.

Commentary

19. The curriculum is very well planned and organised. It is managed innovatively and with dynamism in order to meet the needs of pupils, and is rigorously monitored. In order to provide a broad curriculum that caters well for the interests and needs of its pupils the school has extended the school day and now works on a two-week timetable. The specialist Arts College status has developed into a strong ethos in the school. It is embedded in the culture and has a positive effect on pupils' learning, for example, drama and dance are taught to all pupils in Years 7 to 9. This enriched curriculum extends to other subjects, for example, in modern foreign languages the use of drama is part of the schemes of work and used effectively to help pupils learn. Throughout the school provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is very good. Statutory requirements are fully met.

20. During Years 7 to 9 pupils follow the National Curriculum subjects and religious education. As a result of effective liaison between the school and the primary schools, pupils are set in nine academic groups based on ability in Year 7. A strength of the school is its success in raising the attainment and self-esteem of pupils who are low-attaining or who have problems of integration. In Year 7 three groups have been formed, each of these has the same teacher for English, history, geography and religious education for one year. This approach has been very successful in developing these pupils both academically and socially and the school plans to provide continued support and integrate them back into main stream classes in Years 8 and 9.

21. In Years 10 and 11 pupils follow a broad and balanced programme of courses which lead to GCSE and GNVQ. In addition to the core subjects pupils are guided towards one of three pathways determined by their setting in Year 9. All pupils select at least one arts course to examination level, chosen from an extensive range of arts options. The school provides a good programme of vocational courses (GNVQ) at intermediate and foundation levels. The subjects available have increased steadily in response to the school's desire to provide courses that are appropriate to pupils needs and provide links with further education. The courses are very well planned, monitored and successful. A very high proportion of pupils gain pass grades or better and all pupils successfully complete some modules within the courses they take. The school administers all GNVQ courses very well. As the curriculum is revised systematically every year there are plans to alter and expand this programme in September 2004. Key Skills lessons provide extra support for pupils and emphasise the importance given by the school to improving pupils' competence in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

22. The school is committed to equality of opportunity for all pupils and makes very good provision for all. In some subjects the highest-attaining pupils are “fast-tracked” and take their GCSE examinations early. For example, in French, “fast-track” pupils complete their GCSE at the end of Year 9. This gives them the opportunity to study for an AS level in Year 10 and/or study for GCSE in German. In Year 9 “fast-track” pupils are also identified in art and design and religious education. This provision enables these pupils to achieve very well. Appropriate courses have been developed for pupils who are losing interest in school or who have behavioural difficulties. The school’s experience and commitment to provide an appropriate curriculum draws very effectively on links with other agencies. As a result, effective programmes which link work experience and school based programmes are very successful in encouraging pupils to continue with their education.

23. The curriculum provides very well for pupils with special educational needs and all statutory requirements are met. As the school wants all its pupils to do very well, arrangements are made to support those whose attainment falls below expected levels for their age, and those who have the potential to make rapid progress. In both cases, opportunities are provided for pupils to learn outside of school hours. For example, the Learning Resource Centre homework club is busy every evening, with teachers and support staff available to offer assistance and encouragement.

24. Pupils are very well prepared for the transition to further education. Vocational courses are carefully chosen to allow pupils to continue to study the subject when they go into further education. Staff from the school have started to teach AS level at local colleges, strengthening the existing links.

25. Careers education begins in Year 9 when pupils receive guidance leading to help them make appropriate option choices for Years 10 and 11. All pupils undertake a two-week work experience in Year 10. Careers provision is very good. It forms part of the PSHE course in Years 10 and 11. Pupils who seek advice can consult a full-time Support Careers Co-ordinator in the careers office and have access to documentation and computer programmes. This is supplemented by the support of Connexions. Citizenship is well established in Years 7 to 9 and developing satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11.

26. The school provides pupils with a very rich and extensive programme of extra-curricular experiences and study support. Before school, at lunchtimes and after school pupils have many opportunities for performance in musical activities through the school orchestra and choir and through instrumental tuition, and for dance and drama. A wide range of sporting events broadens the physical education curriculum and most subjects run clubs, study groups and other enrichment activities to extend pupils’ learning. In addition to the many school clubs, there are regular field trips, exchanges with Germany and France, and visits to places of interest at home and abroad. Other initiatives include Summer Schools, the Reading Recovery Programme and High Achievers Day. The school holds the Sportsmark Gold and Artsmark Gold Awards for its commitment and expertise in these aspects of its work.

27. Resources for learning are good. The accommodation is generally of a good standard, providing a well maintained and pleasant environment for learning. However, the music department is in need of better accommodation and practice rooms and improvements are planned. Strikingly colourful displays are used effectively throughout the school to celebrate pupils’ work, inform pupils about activities and act as a stimulus to learning.

28. The match of teachers’ qualifications and experience to the demands of the curriculum is good. Although the school has had significant number of staff changes, coupled with difficulties in recruiting staff in some subjects, current staffing levels and expertise are good. This is enabling high standards to be maintained. The school works very hard to retain and recruit specialist staff and the very good programmes for induction to the school and for staff development are enabling teachers to develop their expertise and maintain high standards in all areas of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes **very good** care of its pupils and ensures their safety. It provides very good support, guidance and advice. Pupils' views are actively sought and valued and the school acts upon them effectively.

Main strengths

- The quality of care is very good throughout the school and leads pupils to have high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Teachers and pupils listen to each other and think hard about how to work together productively.
- Very good arrangements are in place for pupils' induction into the school.
- Pupils are offered high quality support and advice.
- Pupils' involvement in, and commitment to, their school is excellent.
- Teachers value all pupils equally and celebrate all success of any kind.

Commentary

29. New pupils are very happy with the way in which they are helped to settle into school and parents are very positive about the arrangements the school makes. Induction procedures are thorough and imaginative, so staff and pupils know a lot about each other's hopes and expectations. Great care goes into transferring and using personal information, so new pupils settle into school quickly and productively. The recently reorganised system of academic and personal support via key stage co-ordinators and form tutors is very well led and managed. The quality of care is very good throughout the school and leads pupils to have high expectations of what they can achieve. Procedures for child protection and health and safety are conscientiously managed and well understood by all, so that the school is a welcoming and safe place to be.

30. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very positive, because they understand, to an exceptional degree, that teachers act in their best interests. The consistently thoughtful and clearly communicated vision of senior and middle managers is balanced by a commitment to listen to what staff and pupils say. As a result tutors, teachers and pupils listen to each other, take rational decisions and plan with imagination and rare attention to small, but vital, details. Pupils achieve excellent levels of participation, responsibility and success in form time, year councils, school council, as prefects, as members of the anti-bullying committee and as mentors supporting the reading needs of younger pupils. They learn much from participating in these activities and mature rapidly into responsible young adults who value others and their school. These attitudes underpin the success achieved in lessons, as teachers are able to use a range of innovative methods to help pupils learn.

31. An example of the school's approach is seen in Year 7 lower-attaining sets, where one teacher takes all lessons in English, geography, history and religious education. The development of good relationships leads to pupils achieving very well in their development of language, understanding and confidence. They are already developing very positive attitudes to the school and their own potential. Other very successful features of the school include the academic tutorial programme, the many occasions when parents may be formally, or informally, involved in pupils' progress, summer schools and the many extra-curricular opportunities.

32. All pupils are offered much high quality support, information and advice on careers, and further educational opportunities, via lessons in PSHE, by specialist Connexions advisers and at parents' evenings. Very good resources support this work. The counselling service offers further specialist support of very high quality on all personal matters. Pupils said that they felt that there were adults they could talk to if they experienced a problem. It is exceptional that all support, advice and guidance systems in the school are carefully linked and sharply focused on high-achievement, so that communication is thorough, but discreet, and no element feels 'bolted on'.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **very good** links with parents and carers who support their children and the school very well. Links with other schools and colleges and with the local and wider community are **outstanding**. The school is held in very high regard and the very many initiatives taken enhance pupils' experience and support the development of their self-esteem and confidence very well indeed.

Main strengths

- Families and many others in the community use the school regularly, they benefit from access to the learning resource centre and support the extensive number of school productions.
- Very strong involvement of parents and of local and national businesses supports the many extra-curricular activities.
- The parents' forum provides for any concerns or ideas to be shared and also raises funds to support school activities.
- Parents are very appreciative of the extensive range of staff commitment and the high quality information, which they receive.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in community initiatives such as 'Thurrock Area Assemblies'.

Commentary

33. Many examples of partnership greatly enrich pupils' experience, including open access to the school and the learning resource centre at weekends; modern foreign language teaching and promotion of the arts in primary schools. Businesses provide work experience placements. The 'Jack Petchey' achievement award supports effort and awards bursaries. Pupils take part in very many productions, concerts and events and a number of these are taken out of school and performed in the community, for example, the 'music action zone' promotes music in the community. For example, the school orchestra goes on tour to all partner primary schools during the summer term.

34. Parents and carers support the work of the school strongly. A range of meetings provide an opportunity to discuss issues. The school evaluates responses and meetings and courses are offered which parents want, for example on drugs awareness and aspects of the curriculum. The pupils' 'filofax' gives parents an opportunity to respond to homework and other queries and is used well. Parents are very involved in their children's learning and are aware of the very high expectations of the school, which they fully support. The vast majority are overwhelmingly pleased with what the school offers. At the parents meeting held prior to the inspection some parents expressed concern over the high turnover of teachers, for example, in science. A few parents said the school did not do enough for pupils who have special educational needs. Inspectors found the school dealt very effectively with issues relating to the recruitment and retention of staff and provision for pupils with special educational needs to be good.

35. Parents receive very good information about their children's progress. Pupils' annual reports are of very high quality and the interim reports ensure that problems are identified very quickly. Regular meetings provide very good opportunities for parents to find out about their children's progress. The school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents are very informative. They meet statutory requirements. Parents are very clear about the benefits of the 'open door' aspect of the school and the effective procedures for dealing with complaints.

36. The school makes considerable efforts to ensure that parents of special educational needs pupils are fully informed of their children's provision and progress. It works completely within the guidance and requirements of the Code of Practice.

Example of outstanding practice

The school's links with the community and other organisations

Community links make an outstanding contribution to the opportunities offered to pupils during and beyond the school day. The school community fosters links with a wide range of organisations and people to increase the breadth of pupils' experiences. The headteacher and other staff are involved in a leadership role in both feeder primary, and further and wider education areas ensuring that pupils are very well prepared for transition both into and out of the school. Many initiatives have been developed with police and other local agencies. Pilot activities include 'The Respect Campaign' where a theatre group act out scenarios of, for example, domestic violence which enable pupils to evaluate and debate issues. This is to be developed nationally. Other initiatives include the campaign '2 Smart 4 Drugs', launched in school, and which is now being used in other schools. Arts council funding has been used effectively to raise aspirations in the community through the performing arts. Pupils are also encouraged to become fully involved in local issues through involvement with the local council and this enables them to express opinions on the development of facilities for all young people in the area. Members of the school council attend the Thurrock Youth Commission offering pupils the opportunity to be considered for the National Youth Parliament.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are **excellent** and its governance is **very good**.

Main strengths

- The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. There is a consistent drive to share vision and balance skills across the strategic leadership team (SLT). Excellent team work has resulted in a school that has continued to improve.
- Strengths in leadership are found across departments and are consciously promoted by the efforts of the SLT.
- The governing body knows the school well and helps shape its development. It ensures that the school fulfils statutory requirements and provides very good support for senior managers.
- Management is very effective, down to small details. Careful monitoring of achievement and teaching and learning has led to improved standards.
- Excellent planning of training on teaching and learning has improved practice even where staffing has been problematical.
- Leadership and management are also responsible for creating an excellent ethos, which promotes the learning of all pupils and promotes participation in the life of the school as a centre for the performing arts.
- Financial resources are used and managed very well to promote pupils' learning.

Commentary

37. The headteacher has excellent clarity, sense of purpose and high aspirations. These features are shared throughout the strategic leadership team. Careful structuring of the team has ensured that the skills of each member are used very effectively. The school's development planning is firmly based on achievement, and never loses sight of its basic aims. It also concentrates on evaluating and improving leadership and planning skills at all levels, and on assessing the effect of the planning on all stakeholders including the pupils. The inspiration of the leadership team, which extends to the department leaders, is to motivate and influence staff and pupils. This is done impressively. The ethos for pupils is tangible and they report that they are expected to do their best and their work is valued in all areas. The staff are also motivated, to the extent that teacher shortages are dealt with very effectively, with no loss in achievement, and by the creation of effective teams of teachers, even when many are very new to the school or the country. The leadership has a similar effect on the curriculum, which is developing very well as the result of the drive for achievement, both in terms of vocational options and in the direction of increasing challenge for the higher-attaining pupils. As a result, the excellent leadership promotes equality and concern for the needs of all individuals. The entire leadership team are acting as role models for personal concern at a pastoral level, for detailed support at an academic level and for imaginative teaching and learning.

Example of outstanding practice

The excellent leadership of the school

The strategic leadership team has insisted that, throughout the school, staff must have the chance to develop the key skills needed to take the lead in different areas of work. This is seen as the key to sustaining improvement, so leadership is promoted emphatically through middle management. As a result, department leaders share ideas and vision with energy and clarity, so teachers are inspired and see themselves as “leaders of learning”. The relentless drive for improvement and excellence through imaginative teaching and learning has resulted in Gable Hall being listed in the top 100 most improved schools for three years running.

Leadership has been able to overcome staffing shortages via the reputation of the school and the community and through the detailed and careful training and induction of new staff to the school.

Leadership has created an ethos in the school where pupils are proud of their achievements and enjoy seeing them celebrated publicly. An atmosphere has been developed where it is “cool” to learn and “cool” for both boys and girls to participate in performance.

38. The governing body is very supportive and knows the school very well. Governors thoroughly understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, down to accurate predictions about how well different groups are doing and the steps that the strategic leadership team plan to take to deal with them. The governors ensure that statutory duties are met. Where problems exist, the school takes reasonable steps to deal with them. These include change of classrooms in areas of the school that do not fully comply with disability access. They also include training for form tutors and emphasis on space and time for reflection on those days that not all pupils can be fitted into the hall for collective worship. Overall, the governing body provides very good support and challenge for senior leadership and in turn is provided with the information on which to make choices based on direct contact with the departmental leadership group.

39. Provision for special educational needs pupils is very well managed. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is a member of the strategic leadership team which ensures that the needs of these pupils are at the core of the school's development plans. Once pupils with special educational needs have been identified, either through liaison with the feeder schools or subsequently in Gable Hall, subject departments take responsibility for learning strategies and targets. Similarly, departments identify pupils thought to be gifted and talented within their subject and devise additional support and targets. Progress of special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils is carefully monitored through the school's information and data systems. The experienced learning support assistants are well qualified and provide important support for their newer colleagues.

40. The details of the school's systems of self-evaluation and monitoring are excellent both in regard to pupils' achievement and teaching quality. The impact on pupils' achievement is very good and the impact on teaching quality has lead to very good improvement overall and to good improvement, even in areas disrupted by staffing problems.

41. The school values all staff and works very hard to retain, recruit and support staff at all levels. The induction programme and procedures for staff development are excellent. They are enabling new staff to develop their personal skills and expertise and contribute effectively to the school's high standards. A very good induction programme is in place for teachers new to the school and this includes a successful, supportive ‘buddy’ system. Continuing professional development is very good. The school uses expertise within the school and outside consultants very well in very effective in service training programmes. The school has a very strong commitment to initial teacher training and because of its very successful staff development programme is able to use the services of overseas trained teachers and some unqualified staff very successfully. The flexible approach to specific training needs, together with very good use of available expertise, monitoring and response to perceived need, is a model of good practice.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4124234
Total expenditure	4089041
Expenditure per pupil	3314

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	379498
Balance carried forward to the next	414691

42. Approaches to financial management are very good. The school manages its finances very well. There is a clear annual planning cycle closely allied to priorities in the school improvement plan. Governors, the school's leadership team and finance staff are all involved in producing both the annual budget and a longer-term strategic plan. The financial health of the school owes a great deal to the leadership's proactive approach to finding additional sources of revenue. The ability to plan strategically and manage finances prudently has enabled the school to contribute to the several capital projects which have been undertaken, such as the improvements to the hall. The views of pupils are taken into account when arriving at spending priorities. Whilst a significant amount of money was carried forward from the last financial year, this was mainly earmarked for school improvements and much of it has already been spent.

43. The most recent local authority auditors' report (December 2003) was very complimentary to the school, commenting that "the standard of financial management at the school was very good". There were a number of minor issues which have been dealt with. Principles of best value are fully understood and routinely applied to financial management. The school has made very effective use of specialist external consultants to manage its capital projects and there is a constant drive for efficiency and best value both at major spending level, where tendering processes are employed, and in the day-to-day administration and monitoring of spending.

44. Since the time of the previous inspection the minor areas highlighted for improvement have been systematically dealt with and standards raised from average to well above average. This improvement is associated with the quality of leadership and management at all levels in the school and overall has been very good.

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 **very good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and Learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Very good

Main strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Pupils achieve very well.
- The leadership of the department is excellent. Staff work collaboratively and reflect on how to improve further.
- Teachers plan and prepare their work very carefully to meet the needs of pupils.
- The systems for assessment are used effectively to set targets and plan work.
- Good quality group work is used very effectively to challenge pupils' understanding and develop their thinking and communication skills.

Commentary

Examination results

45. Year 9 test results in 2002 and 2003 were well above the national average when compared with similar schools and boys out performed girls. The school's GCSE results for the same two years were very high and all pupils were entered for the examination. Boys and girls perform similarly at this level.

Standards and achievement

46. The standard of work seen was well above average in speaking and listening, reading and writing, with particular strengths in speaking and listening and extended writing. Most pupils speak fluently and with confidence, benefiting from the increased opportunities to speak and perform in subjects such as drama. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. Between Years 7 to 9 pupils complete a very good variety of work. Higher-attaining pupils in these years, who are working well above the national average, demonstrate developing skills in analysis and evaluation, writing accurately and precisely. Lower-attaining pupils find it difficult to write accurately but because the tasks are well planned and supported they can work independently and productively. Good schemes of work help teachers to give lessons that are varied and interesting. A real strength is the very good range of materials used to interest and motivate boys. As they progress from Year 10 to 11 pupils write more fluently and respond very well to the high expectations of care and accuracy. The highest-attaining pupils produce well crafted written work and are versatile in their responses, for example to "Educating Rita" and "Frankenstein". In Years 7 to 9 pupils of all levels of attainment produce well constructed assignments which explore current issues like fox hunting and crime. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is very good. The standard of attainment on entry to the school is broadly in line with the national average. By Year 11 pupils have made very good progress relative to that standard,

especially during Years 10 and 11. This rate of progress is mainly due to the very good quality of teaching pupils receive throughout the school.

Teaching and learning

47. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Through very good planning and thorough preparation teachers meet the needs of all pupils. Consistently high expectations have created a culture of learning which both motivates and supports pupils to achieve. Detailed marking of work and thorough assessment of need, have enabled teachers to set relevant targets for pupils and plan work appropriately. Much of the support for pupils is achieved through the skilful management of group work where very good inclusive practice both challenges the gifted pupils and develops the lower-attainers. Because there is a very good match between teaching and pupils' skill level, behaviour is generally very good. Well planned and focused group work, structured writing plans for the less able and skilful teacher questioning all contribute to the development of independent writing. For example, a strength of many lessons observed was the use of timed activities planned around key ideas or questions, to which pupils, working in groups, were asked to respond. This approach enabled all pupils to be actively involved and to contribute positively using the pool of collective ideas.

Leadership and management

48. The excellent leadership of the department is driven by a simple but powerful vision: 'good teachers getting better'. The department leader has created a team of reflective practitioners who provide mutual support and share good practice and expertise in a spirit of professional development. The management of routine procedures is very good and monitoring is both rigorously and systematically carried out.

49. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. At the end of Year 9 standards in English are well above the national average as are GCSE results. The technical accuracy of written work in Years 7 to 9 has significantly improved, especially that of boys. Lower-attaining pupils undertake a broad range of writing tasks and demonstrate competence in a range of writing styles other than descriptive and narrative. The systems for assessment have been further strengthened and enable greater differentiation for both pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils. Teachers' planning is very good and has been further strengthened by the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Lessons have three distinct parts and have pace and challenge.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

50. Overall the standard of English language and literacy skills is well above the national average. The school has emphasised the importance of the 'literacy focused classroom' and, despite a high turn over of staff, whole school practice is very consistent. Continuing professional development in literacy across the curriculum takes place annually. All departments encourage the use of reading and spelling logs and the use of writing frames and subject specific vocabulary to assist in the development of extended writing. In one very good history lesson lower-attaining pupils were able to use and define words like 'spectacle' and 'gruesome' to describe Roman sports. In a physical education lesson subject specific vocabulary was introduced at the start of the lesson and pupils were reminded regularly of key words. This consistent good practice helps pupils achieve very well.

Modern foreign languages

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

In Year 7 all pupils study French as a first language. The most able linguists begin German in Year 8. In Year 10 the study of one foreign language is compulsory for a proportion of pupils whilst others study a modern foreign language as part of their choice in the options.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	High	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Progress since last inspection	Excellent

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, characterised by high expectations and meticulous planning.
- Achievement at the end of Year 11 is excellent, with GCSE results well above the national average.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- The achievement of high-attaining pupils at the end of Year 9 is excellent.
- Not enough time is given to independent and collaborative learning.

Commentary

Examination results

51. GCSE, results in French and German for boys and girls were well above the national average in 2003. This is evidence of excellent progress the department has made since the last inspection and a direct result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. At the end of Year 9 thirty one pupils were entered for GCSE gaining grades ranging from A* to C.

Standards and achievement

52. Overall, standards in French and German are very high. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are producing work in both French and German that is well above average. On the basis of lessons seen during the inspection almost all pupils in Years 7 to 9 including those with special educational needs achieve very well. A number of pupils take GCSE examinations at the end of Year 9 and then go on to study for AS level in Year 10. French and German AS level is offered to pupils and is being taught by members of the department at a local college. The same picture is apparent in Years 10 and 11. The quality of work in all skills is well above average showing very good to excellent achievement for pupils of all levels of attainment.

Teaching and Learning

53. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in French and German is very good and in some lessons it is excellent. Clear and sustained emphasis is put on developing pupils' spontaneous use of the target language. Teachers are very skilful in using the foreign language as a means of communication in the classroom. As a result, pupils have the confidence to respond and to show initiative in the foreign language. Teachers have high expectations for all pupils at all levels. In a Year 8 French lesson, for example, pupils had the confidence to use the future, past and present tenses in sentences, using connectives. Lesson planning is thorough: it meets individual needs and includes a wide range of interesting and imaginative activities which make pupils want to learn.

Resources such as the overhead projector and PowerPoint presentations are used effectively to present new language and clarify patterns. Pupils' good behaviour in class and positive attitudes enable them to make good progress. They settle down to work quickly and maintain their concentration, making good use of time. Some of the teachers encourage oral work in pairs which improves listening and speaking skills and contributes to the personal development of pupils. However, overall there are not enough opportunities for pupils to work in pairs or in groups. When lessons were less than "very good" or "excellent" language structures were used as the key focus but without putting them in a context which is personally meaningful for the pupils. The use of ICT to enable pupils to work at their own pace to consolidate and extend learning is well anchored in the schemes of work but was not observed during the inspection. Pupils' work is assessed regularly: they are aware of their achievement levels overall and often for individual pieces of work. Marking is very good and informs pupils of the quality of their presentation, their effort, their achievement and of how to improve.

Example of outstanding practice

Context: Set 5 of 5 in Year 10 GCSE. When pupils started the year their French was at basic level. Some of the 30 pupils have behavioural problems.

Objectives: to link simple daily routine in the past tense with more challenging and sophisticated expressions such as "après avoir...", "après être...", "après s'être..." leading to the description of a 'catastrophic' weekend.

A brisk start with a warming up exercise was the introduction to this fast paced, extremely well planned lesson. Expert use was made of a colourful PowerPoint presentation at various times without the lesson losing its momentum. In the revision session, pupils manipulated the present and the past with confidence and all were prepared to take part. Explanations of the new grammatical structures as well as more mundane instructions were in French. Pupils responded in a natural manner showing that the use of the foreign language during lessons had become a habit, for example when unable to answer a pupil simply said "j'ai oublié" or "répétez s'il vous plaît".

New structures were introduced gradually by the teacher, with colour and animated figures on PowerPoint followed by exercises where pupils, in pairs or individually, built on acquired knowledge and gained the confidence to use the grammatical structures in increasingly longer sentences. All pupils including those with special educational needs were actively involved, showing a keen interest.

During the whole lesson the teacher's enthusiasm, backed by meticulous planning, with great care for progression and a strong determination to meet individual needs, captivated pupils and held their attention. The teacher provided stimulating opportunities for pupils to practise language skills, underlined with high expectations and regular encouragement and praise. Pupils concentrated without difficulty: they not only made impressive progress during this lesson but they also enjoyed it.

Leadership and management

54. Leadership and management are excellent and supported by a well qualified and committed team of teachers. The department has been very successful in developing an innovative curriculum. Teachers work as a team and professional discussions help raise standards. Very good monitoring and evaluation procedures underpin incisive forward planning. There is a clear direction for how the subjects should be taught and commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils. The schemes of work are 'working' documents which are read and revised by the whole department at regular intervals. Time is available for lesson observation to share very good practice in teaching. Very good assessment procedures and extra curricular activities support learning. A very good range of extra-curricular activities is offered to pupils including work experience in Germany, and links with schools in Germany, France and Poland through the Comenius/Socrates project. The department is well resourced. Accommodation provision in French and German is very good and the well equipped suite of rooms is enhanced by colourful and culturally-rich displays.

55. All issues identified during the last inspection have been tackled and evidence of excellent improvement can be seen in the standards achieved by pupils.

MATHEMATICS

A statistics lesson was sampled. A small group of pupils take an additional GCSE in statistics. Pupils are on target to reach high grades. In a very good lesson seen, pupils revised techniques such as scattergraphs, lines of "best fit" and principles of correlation to measure how well two sets of data compare. Skilled teaching, especially good questioning, ensured that pupils consolidated their understanding and prepared well for the examination later in the year.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE level.
- Teaching overall is good, and is very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Leadership and management contribute very well to the constant drive to raise standards.
- Opportunities for group work and pupil discussions have improved since the last inspection, but there is still room for further improvement.

Commentary

Examination results

56. Year 9 pupils have repeatedly outperformed pupils in schools nationally, with test results rising each year. In 2003 their performance was above average, and well above that of other pupils who started secondary school with similar standards. Standards in GCSE are well above national averages. In 2003, two thirds of all pupils attained high grade (A* to C). Boys outperformed girls at the highest A and A* grades, but boys and girls together attained twice as many grade B passes as would be expected nationally.

Standards and achievement

57. Overall, standards on entry to the school are average. Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well at all stages. Current Year 9 standards are well above average. Higher-attaining pupils reach high standards in arithmetic, algebra and geometry, often combining them very successfully, for instance in work on the properties of circles. Lower-attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of fractions decimals and percentages, they understand simple algebra and they know angle properties of two-dimensional shapes such as triangles.

58. Current Year 11 standards are well above average. The highest-attaining pupils understand how geometrical transformations such as translations (slides) and stretches affect both the formula for a graph and its resulting shape and position. Many pupils have a very good grasp of algebra and statistics, typically using cumulative frequency graphs and measures such as the median and range to describe sets of data. Lower-attaining pupils are on target to reach lower-grade GCSE passes,

although work on probability, algebra, geometry and general arithmetic is clearly demanding and not always finished successfully.

Teaching and Learning

59. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is predominantly very good, with the remainder good. There is more variation in Years 7 to 9, although teaching is good a few lessons were taught less successfully than most. Teachers have high expectations, for instance introducing advanced statistical ideas to investigate how well the results of probability experiments match up with the theory. Pupils learn well from each other. Participation in the performing arts develops pupils' self-confidence well, so when asked to explain on the board how to multiply and divide large numbers for instance, they do so with great assurance.

60. Mathematics teachers liaise closely with the co-ordinator for special educational needs to ensure that learning targets for these pupils are realistic. This in turn ensures that lessons are well matched to pupils' capabilities. Classroom assistants know pupils well and work very effectively with them, where they are available.

61. Although opportunities for group work and discussion have improved since the last inspection, some teachers limit opportunities for pupils to work in this way. For instance, having to take on trust the rules for working with powers and indices rather than working them out for themselves restricted pupils' achievement in one lesson. Too much "teacher talk" was the main reason why one lesson was judged satisfactory overall, despite good and very good features also being present.

62. Nearly all pupils have very good attitudes and want to do well. Class relationships are harmonious and lessons proceed briskly. However, despite good features, some lessons are only satisfactory because tolerance of noise leads to some time-wasting. In one lesson ineffective class management led to very slow teaching pace and widespread underachievement, resulting in the lesson overall being graded poor.

Leadership and management

63. Subject leadership and management are both very good. The drive to maintain high standards, supported by very good assessment and target setting, and a strong sense of teamwork, all contribute very well to learning. Thorough planning and excellent arrangements for new staff to familiarise themselves with the school ensure that learning progresses smoothly as pupils move up the school. Additional lessons and workshops at lunch-time are a good addition to the formal provision and support pupils' learning very well.

Mathematics across the curriculum

64. This is satisfactory overall. A development programme is in place, and in subjects where this is already planned, provision is good. For example, pupils use graphs to analyse the results of science experiments to investigate the relationship between distance, speed and time. In physical education, pupils use a range of data handling techniques to monitor their progress on fitness programmes.

65. Improvement since the last inspection is good. High standards have continued to rise and teaching has improved to provide more opportunities for discussion.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths

- The science department has maintained pupils' good achievement in spite of extreme turbulence in staffing.
- Teaching overall is good, with a good range of strategies and good training to develop the challenge of teaching in lessons.
- A clear development plan is in place with very good analysis of achievement which is directed well towards improvement.
- The use of ICT promotes good teaching and learning.
- Leadership and management are very good and promote very good teamwork.

Commentary

Examination results

66. In 2003, results in the Year 9 tests were above average. This is an improvement over the previous three years. Results when compared with pupils' prior attainment were above average at level 5 and well above at level 6. In 2003, GCSE results were above average, thanks to the performance of higher-attaining pupils in the triple science set and the 100 per cent pass rate at A*-G in double award science.

Standards and achievement

67. Standards observed at the school matched the examination results and were above average in Year 9 and in Year 11. The emphasis of the school on monitoring is leading to improved achievement. For example, very good analysis of the reasons for weaker performance in science than in English and mathematics is already having an impact via training on standards in GCSE coursework. The school ethos helps to raise achievement, because the learning culture enables pupils to recognise what it takes to learn well and share it with others in lower-attaining sets. It helps pupils with special educational needs to achieve well. Combined with this is teachers' willingness to set challenges for higher-attaining sets and thus improve the achievement of gifted pupils. A strong emphasis on improving boy's achievement has led to improvement.

Teaching and learning

68. Overall, teaching and learning are good. It varies between satisfactory and very good. It is more variable in Years 7 to 9, where pupils have one teacher for all their science lessons and teaching overall is satisfactory. It is good in Years 10 and 11, where all pupils have three teachers to cover the science disciplines and there is more chance of their experiencing good role models. This strong teaching is well targeted to the more challenging sets and contributes to the good achievement both of special educational needs and above average sets. Where teaching is strong, it is characterised by good planning of work to meet the needs of different pupils and a high level of challenge including the questioning styles used. The strong teaching promotes pupil independence with particular emphasis on the valuing of learning. As exemplified when some pupils in a Year 10

class who had understood electronic shells were used to help those that had not, showing very good personal development.

69. The department has worked well with lesson structuring, making good use of role play, group work, starter activities, well defined learning objectives and immediate feedback for assessment information. This was evident in the use of individual whiteboards in Year 9 to test photosynthesis and by colour coding to test recall of food tests in Year 8. The department is using ICT increasingly to support teaching, with good results. Examples include the use of open ended writing frames to assist Year 7 pupils with special educational needs to record observations of exciting pressure demonstrations. Pupils also use the ICT room for research and presentation on topics such as steroid abuse, which was particularly motivating to a Year 11 class. Specialist science teaching in Years 10 and 11, assisted the high level nature of the work including literacy work, especially in biology, and numeracy across the physics module and the use of symbols and calculations in chemistry.

70. The department had been weakened by serious staffing turnover over the past few years, including at departmental leadership level. A number of staff are still very new to the department. However, the emphasis on teaching and learning and on monitoring achievement has minimised the disruption and standards of teaching are good overall.

Leadership and management

71. Leadership of the department is very good. Although new, departmental leadership has provided very good role models and implemented the schools teaching and learning policy, with very good staff induction. Staff have been very well supported by the strategic leadership team and provided with external support and time for necessary training. Strong elements are the emphasis on achievement and the teaching and learning-led ethos that supports and complements the general school ethos. The department has analysed examination results, with great precision and self-criticism. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is still in process of implementation but the GCSE curriculum has been strengthened. Accommodation is good, although the laboratories are not in such good condition as their age might suggest and resources only satisfactory. Technical support is very good, as is the role played by learning support assistants within science lessons. The teaching in the department was criticised in the previous inspection report. In spite of intervening staff turnover, there have been solid improvements across all the areas identified and there has been good improvement in standards. Improvement is therefore good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, provision for information and communications technology (ICT) is **very good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The significant improvement in results which are well above the national average.
- Pupils achieve very well due to effective specialist teaching.
- Pupils are motivated and work very hard.
- The leadership of the subject and mentoring of staff are very good.
- The ICT achievement of most pupils in Years 10 and 11 is not monitored or recognised.

Commentary

Examination results

72. Pupils enter the school with widely different ICT experience and standards are around the national average at the start of Year 7. By the end of Year 9, accurate and well monitored teacher assessments show that standards are well above the national average. In examination courses at the end of Year 11 standards are well above the national average. Girls do even better than boys.

Standards and achievement

73. Standards seen during the inspection confirm that pupils' achievement as a result of the well planned courses is very good overall. Only around 40 per cent of each year takes an ICT option for GCSE or GNVQ and provision for the majority of pupils is limited to ICT delivered as part of other subjects. Whilst pupils receive a rich diet of ICT provision in Years 10 and 11 with coverage of the National Curriculum assured through careful planning, the achievement of pupils is not monitored or accredited and so standards for the majority of pupils cannot be judged accurately by the school.

Teaching and learning

74. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are good and in Years 10 and 11, within the subject, teaching is very good. A team of subject specialists delivers lessons where pupils make very good progress due to clear structures to lessons, clear instructions and good feedback on pupils' work. In all years, teaching seen was never less than good and was often very good. All teachers operate as facilitators very well because of good subject knowledge. The department instils very good routines so that pupils usually move to the front to receive whole class teaching without fuss. These inputs are interspersed with pupil's individual and group work using the computers where teachers give one to one support, maintaining interest and motivation. Therefore, learning is very good because of the very good teaching. For example, in several lessons very well prepared PowerPoint presentations from the teacher were met by rapt attention from the pupils. This was followed by time for pupils to practise new skills with the teacher monitoring, supporting and advising pupils before bringing them back together to review their learning and introduce new skills. In all lessons there is a sharp focus on learning, with good pace and high expectations. Pupils behave very well and relationships are very good and sometimes excellent. Pupils work very hard, leading to rapid progress and high quality output. The layout of some ICT rooms and the number of computers, present challenges to staff and make teaching more difficult.

Leadership and management

75. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Within the department, teachers are well led with support and encouragement for newer members of the department. Staff are deployed very well and mentoring of graduate and newly qualified teachers is very effective and has resulted in good or very good teaching from less experienced teachers. The departmental systems for assessing and recording progress and sharing this information with pupils are exemplary and contribute to the raising of standards. The time allocated for ICT in Years 7 to 9 is in line with government recommendations. A clear vision and focus on achievement has led to the very good improvement in standards.

Cross-curricular ICT

76. The use of ICT is good and embedded in the schemes of work of all subjects, examples were seen of very good use in several subjects during the inspection. For example, in music very good use is made of computers to develop the skills of pupils in composition. In physical education digital cameras are used to analyse movement. The leadership and management of ICT across the school is very good. There is a clear philosophy for the model adopted and a large amount of staff training has taken place leading to confident use amongst the staff. The school's performance management systems are used to monitor staff competence and confidence in the use of ICT. However, monitoring of pupils' actual ICT competence is not rigorous and their achievement outside ICT GCSE and GNVQ courses in Years 10 and 11 is not recorded. There has been a lot of investment in staffing and equipment which has resulted in very good improvement in ICT provision in recent

years. As staff confidence increases, the demand for equipment grows. The number of computers is a little above the national average, but, teachers are using ICT increasingly to aid pupils' learning and facilities are not keeping up with the growing demand.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above national averages and current standards are very high.
- Consistently well managed teaching has resulted in yearly improvement in standards and to most pupils achieving their full potential.
- Pupils and staff collaborate fully in a thoughtful approach to teaching and learning.
- The department knows it has more to do, including developing further pupils' use of ICT.

Commentary

Examination results

77. The results of Year 9 assessments in 2003 were well above those reported nationally, having improved constantly over the last three years. Boys, in particular, did very well, although girls gained more of the higher grades. GCSE examination results in 2003 were far higher than the national average, as all pupils achieved an A*-C grade and over half gained A or A*.

Standards and achievement

78. In Year 9 standards are well above average, and represent excellent achievement as pupils enter the school with patchy experience of the essential skills and ideas of geography. Pupils in lower groups, for example the Year 7 'GAR' sets, make particularly good progress and display understanding well above expectation for their entry levels because teachers are innovative and well-organised. In Year 11 standards are well above average because teachers maintain their high expectations and enable pupils to cope with highly demanding work. Achievement is again excellent, as pupils have consistently exceeded their predicted targets over the past four years. A major success factor is that pupils value their teachers' skills and commitment. They apply themselves very well to work, whatever their level of attainment, because they rightly believe that they can do well.

Teaching and Learning

79. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. In all years teachers use a wide range of challenging methods which are well adapted to pupils' needs. Work provided is relevant, for example, the Year 9 Global Fashion module captures interest and raises issues of world citizenship. As a result pupils learn readily and develop responsible attitudes. Teachers help and encourage

pupils of all levels of attainment to think, and to understand how well they are doing and what to do to improve.

Leadership and management

80. The department has an excellent clarity of direction and a very reflective, open and collaborative style. This leads to constant questioning of how to do better. Management systems are very well implemented, monitored and evaluated so that, for example, sensible changes are made to courses for the benefit of pupils. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, as most issues raised have been well addressed. Although there has been a consistent improvement in teaching, learning and standards, the department is working on developing areas such as increasing pupils' use of ICT and improving further the results of higher-attaining pupils.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Very good	Good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved steadily over the last two years.
- Assessment procedures are excellent and drive all aspects of the department's work.
- Teachers' methods motivate pupils to enjoy, and do well in, history.
- This 'new' department team has achieved much but there has not been enough time for the full effects of the positive changes to be seen in even higher examination results.

Commentary

Examination results

81. Results of Year 9 assessments have improved significantly over the last two years, but in 2003 remained below those reported nationally. Girls did better than boys in gaining above average grades. GCSE examination results in 2003 were above the national average, but well below the school average for A*-C grades.

Standards

82. Current standards seen in Year 9 are above average. Pupils achieve very well as they enter school lacking historical experience and knowledge. In Year 11 pupils are achieving well because current standards are above average and good when compared to pupils' prior attainment in history.

Teaching and Learning

83. Recent emphasis on improving the 'basics' in Years 7 to 9 has paid dividends. Literacy is very well supported. Teachers use innovative, relevant and active methods, so history is challenging, but fun. For example, a Year 7 lesson on the Roman Republic required pupils to act out the principles on which it was based, and guaranteed very good understanding and long-term learning. GCSE pupils learn well because good teaching results in clear understanding of ideas and examination requirements. Teachers' methods are challenging and thought provoking, engaging pupils' interest and commitment by their relevance. Assessment is used very creatively and provides an accurate diagnostic basis for all decisions about group, individual and teacher performance, and for planning

the curriculum. Self-assessment is developing well. As a result most pupils understand very well what to do to improve their work. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.

Leadership and management

84. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, despite severe staffing problems. The current team have very clear strategic direction, priorities and plans, and have achieved much in a short time. Although Year 9 standards last year were lower than when last inspected, they had nevertheless improved significantly for each of the previous two years. Staff relationships are strongly collaborative, and responsibilities and very good resources are shared for maximum impact. Decisions are taken after thorough analysis of assessment information and careful self evaluation. Relationships with pupils are very good. Improvement in standards remains clearly at the top of the agenda, and pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own progress. As a result the number of pupils taking history in Years 10 and 11 has increased dramatically. Weaker areas are that the implementation of all department systems is not yet fully consistent, and pupils do not use ICT as much as possible in all lessons. The department is aware of these issues and has appropriate plans for improvement.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

	Years 7,8 and 9	Years 10 and 11 short course	Full GCSE
Standards	In line with expectations	In line with expectations	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths

- Pupils entered for the GCSE full course achieve well above average results.
- The experienced team of teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise.
- Very good relationships with pupils contribute to good learning.

Commentary

Examination results

85. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades in the full course GCSE was well above the national average. Results in the GCSE short course examination for 2003 for the large proportion of pupils entered were in line with expectations.

Standards and achievement

86. Pupils display a secure knowledge and understanding of the main faith groups and their beliefs. In Year 9 they spoke and wrote articulately about issues of prejudice and discrimination, with higher and middle-attaining pupils, in particular, drawing well on their knowledge of different faiths to inform their views.

87. Standards of pupils in Years 10 and 11 were well above expectations in the full GCSE course. For example, all pupils in a group studying the story of St Damien in the leper colony, showed a strong understanding of the nature of Christian responsibility and service to others, and reflected this

in their written work. All pupils in the core groups for religious education follow a short GCSE course, and the majority choose to enter the examination. Current standards are average.

Teaching and learning

88. The experienced and knowledgeable team ensure pupils receive a varied diet of interesting activities. There is an emphasis on getting pupils actively involved in what they study, for example by using elements of drama. A very good lesson was seen with a Year 8 class looking at the ten Gurus and the concept of leadership. It combined clear and simply stated lesson outcomes with a series of activities that regularly engaged and challenged the pupils. Pupils were confident enough by the end of the lesson to volunteer for the 'hot seat', and be quizzed on what they had learned. A core GCSE group was presented with a range of images of the natural beauty and intricacy of our world. The teacher skilfully built on these to demonstrate the power of the design argument for God's existence. As a result, by the end of the lesson a significant number in the class decided they were now not so sure that God did not exist. Pupils are presented throughout their course with opportunities for research, and pupils achieve well overall, with outstanding outcomes from pupils with a strong personal interest, and those identified by the department as having great potential in the subject.

Leadership and management

89. Following recent staffing difficulties there has been a strong core team in place since the beginning of the year. As a result, department planning is having a significant impact on the achievement of pupils, including an important contribution to citizenship. So improvement since the last inspection is good. All pupils are thoughtfully provided for, including younger higher-attaining pupils, for whom a "fast-track" to the GCSE short course in Year 9 is being offered. Appropriate targets for development include the provision of alternative certification for lower-attaining pupils, and planning suitable challenges in Year 10 for the "fast-track"-track group.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Good
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good overall GCSE results; very good results in food technology.
- Good teaching and learning.
- Effective teamwork enables teachers to use their subject expertise well.
- Very good working relationships in lessons.
- Good quality practical work and good use of literacy in lessons.
- Lack of quality and consistency in design related work, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- In some lessons the work set does not challenge all pupils sufficiently.
- Arrangements for assessment at the end of Year 9 need to be more rigorous.

Commentary

Examination results

90. In 2003, results of teacher assessments recorded at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average, however, inspection evidence indicates some over estimation. Standards of current work are average. In 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in their GCSE examinations was above the national average. Results for food technology continued to be well above average. The proportion of boys and girls gaining A* and A grades was the same as the national average.

Standards and achievement

91. Pupils of all ability levels develop good understanding of materials and their use as they move through the school. By the end of Year 9, the quality of practical work is good but pupils' understanding of design processes and opportunities to develop recording skills are more limited. By the end of Year 11, pupils' coursework is good in both design folders and practical work. However, in graphics and resistant materials, this is achieved as the result of substantial effort towards the end of the course, rather than progressive development of design related skills throughout the course. Completed design folders demonstrate good levels of recording and presentation skills and the work of higher-attaining pupils is often very good. Computers are used well to present work and for designing products. Pupils develop confidence and competence in using a range of materials in practical work and, because they receive strong support from their teachers, this often results in well-made artefacts. Pupils achieve well by the end of Years 9 and 11. However, schemes of work do not ensure the consistent and progressive development of design related activities throughout the school.

Teaching and learning

92. Teachers have very good technical knowledge and develop very good working relationships in lessons. Lesson time is managed well and good individual support enables pupils to develop and apply good levels of knowledge and understanding. Most lessons include development of some aspects of literacy and there is increasing good use of computers to research and present work. Pupils are compliant and co-operative and show interest in the tasks set. They show good levels of concentration, particularly when involved in practical work. Many spend a lot of time in presenting their final coursework to a good standard and homework is used well to reinforce learning. Time is used well in most lessons, but in some, work is not planned carefully enough to ensure all pupils are fully challenged all of the time. Overall, marking is good. Assessment for GCSE courses is good and regular feedback to pupils enables them to improve their work.

Leadership and management

93. Good teamwork is effective in drawing on teachers' strengths and provides good support for new and inexperienced teachers. Departmental documentation is sound and appropriate programmes of work are being developed. Some very successful extra-curricular work extends pupils' opportunities to take part in competitions and in making links with the community. Procedures for making teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are not rigorous enough. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Lessons were sampled in performing arts, drama and dance and discussions held with staff with management responsibilities. Inspection evidence shows that these subjects make a significant contribution to developing pupils' self-esteem, personal qualities and inter-personal skills successfully. The subjects motivate pupils and support the development of their creative talents very strongly.

The departments run many extra-curricular activities and have numerous links with performers and other schools and colleges. Collaboration with other departments is a strong feature, for example, drama makes a positive contribution to the religious education and PSHE curriculum.

Dance

94. From observations of two lessons, pupils taking dance GCSE are attaining standards that are above average. They are developing solo evaluations of their chosen theme and motif. Their performances are extended effectively through a growing understanding of techniques such as dance by chance and adapting movements. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are attaining very good standards in dance. They are growing in confidence in their movements through using props and stimuli. The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good so pupils of all levels of attainment respond well to teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are very well planned and structured with pupils fully engaged in planning and assessing their work. Teachers use the excellent dance studio and resources extremely well and this is having a direct impact on the standards achieved. A very good start has been made in introducing this subject into the timetable and boys and girls are benefiting from the opportunities provided.

Drama

95. Drama is taught to every pupil in Years 7 to 9 and is becoming a popular option in Years 10 and 11. The standard of work seen was well above average. Pupils make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and transfer the skills learned in drama into other subject areas, through, very good group co-operation and speaking and listening. A good assessment system enables the identification of gifted and talented pupils who are "fast-tracked" in Years 9 and 10 to GCSE and AS level. The standard of written work in Years 10 and 11 is good with pupils writing competently about complex issues like anorexia and developing good evaluative and research skills.

96. Teachers' high expectations result in high standards of co-operation and performance from the majority of pupils. Pupils are achieving very well. The development of self awareness and self discipline and of a strong team ethic enables the school to present a number of public performances each year. Most recently the department has launched its own GOT Theatre Company, the membership of which is open to pupils from neighbouring schools.

Performing arts

97. One Year 10 lesson was sampled. The lesson was well planned and the quality of teaching and learning was good. Pupils settled quickly to a starter activity. This prepared them well for the main assignment, which was planning the introduction to a written evaluation of a performance. They were confident to ask questions and keen to do well. During the introduction to the main activity pupils listened attentively. Good quality written materials provided a clear framework to help pupils plan their writing. Pupils were consistently encouraged by the teacher and emphasis was placed on pupils justifying the opinions they expressed. Pupils showed good understanding of how they had improved their performances and the reasons for changes that they had made.

Art and design

The quality of provision in art and design is **very good**.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving consistently and pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
- Pupils have positive and respectful attitudes to work.
- Teaching is knowledgeable, challenging and often inspirational.
- Different courses are taught, appropriate to a wide range of ability.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Accommodation and resources are excellent.
- Sketch books could be used more effectively to plan, record and evaluate.

Commentary

Examination results

98. Results in GCSE examinations were above average and continued a rising trend. A quarter of all pupils gained grade A* or A in 2003. Girls' results were better than boys.

Standards and achievement

99. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with very different experiences of art and standards overall are below average. By the end of Year 9, pupils reach the expected standards so achieve well. Their practical work shows a good acquisition of skills in painting, drawing, ceramics and creative textiles. Their knowledge of art vocabulary improves each year as they learn new techniques and evaluate their work. Girls generally operate at a higher level than boys with good drawing derived from careful observation. Lower-attaining pupils do well but rely heavily on guidance from the teachers. Pupils learn about artists and art movements and make regular reference to them in their own work. By the end of Year 11, pupils' practical skills are well developed. Most pupils show confidence in a range of media and use effective research techniques. Pupils' work in textiles is outstanding as a result of very good teaching and supportive links with further education. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs do well because each pupil is valued, treated as an individual and work is well matched to their needs. Current standards show continued improvement and pupils achieve very well.

100. Attitudes to the subject are very good. Pupils respect their teachers and treat their own and others' work with care. Opportunities are available for pupils to take responsibility in the studios and relationships are good. Colourful displays across the school celebrate pupils' art work. The subject makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Teaching and learning

101. Teaching is good in each year and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning strategies have improved since the last inspection. The range of teacher expertise is a strength, allowing pupils learn to work in many different media. Activities are well balanced. This is a result of the thought that the teaching team puts into planning and the very good schemes of work which have been thoroughly revised and improved since the last inspection. Teachers explain the lesson objectives, including important and new art vocabulary, though pupils do not always consolidate this learning by recording it in their sketch books. When pupils write down the objectives and add their own outcomes, it helps their learning and enables them to track their own progress. This supports the well implemented assessment procedures. Pupils know how well they are doing because all classwork and homework are carefully marked. Pupils know their National Curriculum level and how to improve. Teaching benefits from very good technical support.

102. Planned and incidental use of ICT, judged to be minimal in the last inspection, is improving. Accommodation and resources are excellent. Dark room photography is a recent development. The department responds to pupils' varying needs by offering a number of different courses. Besides GCSE Art and Design, pupils may take GCSE Textiles. Lower-attaining pupils have the opportunity to take a more structured course, equivalent to GCSE, with a vocational bias. Pupils with special talents are identified and take GCSE early. Five Year 11 pupils are currently working at an advanced level.

Leadership and management

103. Management and leadership are very good. Overall, pupils' achievements are very good and standards above average by the end of Year 11. Organisation and administration are excellent, evident in the high quality departmental handbook. The art department plan is forward looking. It offers clear direction and makes a strong impact on the creative life of the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Music

The overall provision in music is **very good**.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teacher's high level practical skills are used well to demonstrate skills and enthuse pupils contributing positively to their progress and learning.
- Pupils enjoy the subject and as a consequence work hard.
- Pupils' performing and composing skills are well developed.
- ICT is used well to support pupils' composing development.
- On the occasions when lessons are not in specialist rooms progress is slower.

Commentary

104. GCSE examination results for 2003 were well above the national average for 16-year-old pupils. These results showed an improvement on previous years. There was no significant difference of attainment between boys and girls.

Standards and achievement

105. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with varied previous musical experience and have below average skills overall. With the benefit of good teaching, teachers' high expectations and the additional time allocated for the subject pupils achieve well and standards are at the expected level. By the end of Year 9 pupils' good achievement continues and current standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. Pupils have good rhythmic skills and this is contributing well to their performance skills, which are well established. Pupils use improvisation skills in their compositions, which are beginning to show development and originality. These were evident in their Blues compositions, including inventive improvisation skills to fit correctly to a Blues chord sequence. Inventive skills were also evident in "Show Song" compositions using a range of composing techniques to produce compositions that showed imagination and creativity. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and make good progress.

Teaching and learning

106. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject expertise using their performing skills and their enthusiasm for the subject to motivate and quickly engage pupils' interest. Lessons are planned well to meet the individual needs of all pupils. This was most noticeable in a Year 11 practical lesson. Here all pupils were fully involved in a group performance contributing positively to individual performing skills and their overall enjoyment of the subject. Assessment

procedures are well established. Levels of attainment are clearly displayed and pupils have a clear understanding how they can improve their work and what to do to reach the next level. Teachers have good discipline, allowing lessons to proceed with pace, which contributes positively to pupils' learning. ICT is used well and is contributing positively to pupils' development of compositions. When lessons are in specialist rooms pupils achievement is good. There are, however, some lessons that are in rooms that are a distance away from the main music rooms and are not equipped with specialist resources. As a consequence teachers find it hard to provide an appropriate range of practical activities and pupils are not so well motivated, which results in slower progress. Pupils were clear that they do not enjoy the lessons in these rooms.

Leadership and management

107. The management and leadership of the subject are very good. The development of ICT in the curriculum, a greater emphasis on singing and the improved resources are all adding to pupils' musical opportunities as a whole. The good ethos and the open house policy at break and lunch times when pupils are encouraged to 'drop in' are contributing positively to their learning.

108. The wide range of extra-curricular ensembles is providing a rich and varied musical experience, with challenging activities for gifted and talented pupils. The improvement since the previous inspection is good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The dance element of physical education is being established as a separate subject. In Years 7 to 9 dance has a designated period each week and this is in addition to the two hours of taught physical education for each pupil. GCSE courses are offered in both subjects. However for pupils in Years 10 and 11, dance remains an element in the core physical education programme.

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11 (core)	GCSE
Standards	Above average	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- The teamwork and enthusiasm of the teachers for the subject.
- Pupil involvement in, and assessment of, their learning.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good.
- The very good relationships between pupils and teachers.

Commentary

Examination results

109. Results in 2003 GCSE examinations were well above average and show continued improvement. Overall boys attain better results than girls do; nevertheless the girls' results are above the national average. Both boys and girls do at least as well in physical education as in other subjects in the school, and do better than in many.

Standards and achievement

110. Year 9 pupils, in 2003, achieved average standards. Lesson observations, pupils' work and discussions with pupils during the inspection indicate that standards are now above average. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of techniques and skills relating to a wide variety of games, to gymnastics and to health related fitness. In badminton, basketball and fitness pupils use their knowledge and understanding very effectively to evaluate and further improve their performance and that of others. Considering that pupils enter the school with below expected standards, this represents very good achievement. By Year 11 pupils have built further on their skills and have greater understanding of the anatomical and physiological importance of exercise and health. As a result the performance of most pupils in the core programme is well above average in games, fitness and in dance.

Teaching and learning

111. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Pupils throughout the school benefit from being taught by teachers who have both a very good knowledge and personal enjoyment of physical education. In Years 7 to 9 lessons are planned and structured well, providing a range of activities that fully involve pupils of all levels of attainment. Pupils with additional education needs, including those noted as gifted and talented, progress at a rate that matches that of other pupils. In Years 10 and 11, teachers fully understand the requirements of the courses they teach and lessons are planned very well. Tasks are varied, interesting and challenging and actively involve the pupils in evaluation of performance and in assessment of their learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, which helps learning. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, who in turn have very good attitudes to physical education. A strong feature of all lessons is the way pupils engage with the tasks, work co-operatively and maintain concentration. Assessment is very good because pupils are partners in the process so it is a key feature of very successful learning. Teachers share the learning objectives and the assessment criteria with the pupils. A very good example of this was observed in a Year 8 badminton lesson where pupils were asked to observe their peers in action, provide feedback on performance and then at the end of the session complete a personal assessment of their overall success in that unit of work. A Year 11 dance session involved pupils in assessment processes in a similar way. In addition teachers provide high quality feedback to pupils, which enhances learning and performance. The nature of the subject requires that most feedback is oral, but from samples of written work presented there is evidence that marking is also of high quality.

Leadership and management

112. The leadership and management of the subject are very good and all members of the team share responsibility for management. Indeed the way in which the teachers work together has a direct impact upon standards. This is evidenced by the high quality of discussion about learning, at the department meeting held during the inspection. Each member of the team is prepared to share ideas and resources for improving teaching and the focus is learning. Department development planning and documentation are very good and focus on raising standards. The curriculum is well planned and all pupils have a minimum of two hours of physical education each week. Many pupils participate in extra-curricular activities on and off the school site. The quality of teaching and coaching, as well as the variety of activities, is having a positive impact upon pupils' learning. The indoor accommodation and resources, including excellent displays of information, pupils work and assessment criteria, are very good and contributing directly to improvements in achievement. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection so standards are continuing to improve.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Lessons were sampled in GNVQ health and social care, hospitality and catering and media studies.

GNVQ health and social care

113. This course is very well planned, taught, monitored and assessed. The teaching and learning observed were very good. Teachers are very clear about coursework requirements and use a range of teaching methods very effectively to encourage and support pupils learning. As a result pupils are keen, active participants in discussions and demonstrate a very mature approach to their learning. Language development is particularly strong and is instrumental in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding. Good effective use is made of computers as a learning tool. Teachers' high expectations encourage pupils to be active participants in lessons and as a result working relationships are very good. Pupils have respect for the contributions of others and are keen to share their prior knowledge. They respond very positively to well planned and prepared learning situations and are developing independent learning skills. Achievement is very good and standards high.

GNVQ Hospitality & catering

114. In the lesson observed teaching and learning were very good. Pupils worked productively through a task that developed their understanding of the costs and benefits of alternative methods of food preparation. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils were excellent and the standards seen were above average.

Media studies

115. In the lesson observed pupils achieved well because of clear and well informed teaching. Very good attitudes and behaviour created a very positive learning environment where pupils were able to deepen their knowledge and understanding of tabloid news priorities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Overall provision for Citizenship is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Insufficient evidence to make a judgment

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	N/A

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well planned implementation of the programme of study.
- Very clear and imaginative teaching enabling pupils to achieve very well.
- Procedures are in place to assess, record and report on pupils' achievement.
- The scheme of work for Years 10 and 11 is not as detailed as that taught in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

Standards and achievement

116. There have been no external tests of standards in citizenship. Overall, the standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 have varied but are better than expected. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are above the national expectation. Pupil's achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good due to the very good focus that the school has placed on the course. For example pupils are given opportunities to consider issues such as "fair trade" in the global fashion industry through geography and show a very good level of understanding of the issues. In Years 10 to 11, pupils' achievement is very good because they have already benefited from a series of opportunities lower down the school and their greater maturity enables them to apply this learning to real world scenarios. As an example of the very high standards achieved in an English lesson, an extremely powerful poem created by a pupil dealt at a very high level with attitudes to young criminals.

Teaching and learning

117. In Years 7 to 9 the teaching seen was very good overall, and sometimes excellent. Learning too was very good because of the clear imaginative and inspirational teaching, rapid pace and very positive attitudes and behaviour of pupils. Planning is very good and the citizenship assessment opportunities are made clear to pupils. In Years 10 and 11, too small range of teaching was seen to make an overall judgement but the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to excellent. In the best lessons teachers create stimulating learning environments and prepare challenging work which requires pupils to think for themselves. Pupils are very well motivated, have very positive mature attitudes and behave very well. Where learning was less successful, topics are well planned and teaching was knowledgeable but the pace of learning dropped when pupils worked individually.

Leadership and management

118. There is a clear vision for the implementation of this new subject and it is already well embedded within humanities subjects. A scheme of work clearly identifies how the programme of study for Years 7 to 9 is being delivered and the leadership of the department together with senior management has mapped the curriculum well. Pupils achieve well through a combination of discreet lessons and citizenship focus days. The department has planned the assessment, monitoring and reporting of the subject very well and involves pupils in their own assessment so they are clear about how they are achieving. All departments are dealing with citizenship issues. The scheme of work for Years 10 and 11 is not as detailed as that taught in Years 7 to 9.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1
The leadership and management of the school	1
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	1
The effectiveness of management	1

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