

INSPECTION REPORT

The Cooper School

Bicester

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123234

Headteacher: Mr Andrew Hamilton

Lead inspector: Mrs Susan Chamberlain

Dates of inspection: 1st - 4th December 2003

Inspection number: 258804

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: Community
Age range of pupils: 11 to 16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll; 1046

School address: Churchill Road
Bicester
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Telephone number: 01869 242121
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body
Name of chair of governors: Mr David Dunne

Date of previous inspection: 9 March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Cooper School is an average sized (1,046 pupils; 553 boys, 493 girls), 11 to 16 comprehensive which serves the community of Bicester and surrounding villages. The school loses a number of pupils to the Buckinghamshire selective system and to independent schools. Most pupils are White British. There are very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils, who have special educational needs, including those with statements, is 27.6 per cent, which is in line with the national average. Of these 1.8 per cent has statements. The school has Investors In People status and is applying for specialist designation in science. The overall attainment of pupils when they enter the school is below average but closing on the average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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25377	Lorna Brown	Team inspector	Art
8859	Tom Dodd	Team inspector	Design and technology
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school with many very good features. The quality of education is effective, standards in examinations meet expectation and pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. The school is well led and financial control is secure. It provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching is good and pupils are cared for well. As a consequence pupils' achievement is good across the school and examination results are improving; however, this improvement needs consolidation.
- The headteacher leads the school very well and is well supported by the senior leadership team; his clear vision enables a very good curriculum in Years 10 and 11 especially in terms of work related aspects.
- Key skills in literacy and information and communication technology, although improving, are still too low and the use of ICT across the curriculum is insufficient.
- The school has very strong links with the community and other schools but could strengthen links with parents.
- The presentation of the school, in terms of its environment, and the pupils, in terms of their dress code and their work books, is untidy.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to learn and assess their work independently.
- The school has increased its effectiveness since its previous inspection and has dealt well with the issues raised.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 results

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

*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' achievement, including those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language, is good and very good when comparing test results only in Years 6 and 9. It is very good in art across the school, and in history in Years 7 to 9 and good in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, citizenship, modern foreign languages and physical education; it is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9 but better in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' progress through the school is sustained and rapid. In 2003, in statutory tests, standards were the highest ever and in line with national averages. GCSE results in 2003 were higher than those of the previous two years and close to the national average for 5A* to C grades. When compared with pupils' previous attainment results were well above average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11. Standards in the work seen were in line with national expectations, overall. However, girls perform better than boys in class.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good, in Years 7 to 11. Both the attitudes and behaviour of pupils in the school are good although bullying can be a minor problem. This is usually dealt with promptly and effectively. Attendance is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good and teaching and learning are good being marginally better in Years 10 and 11. A large proportion of lessons are very good and a couple are excellent. A few lessons have shortcomings. Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to work independently and assess their own work. Overall, assessment is good but pupils do not always understand how they can improve. The curriculum is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11, where work related courses are strong. Provision for enrichment is good. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The provision for pupils' care, welfare and health and safety is very good, pastoral support being very effective.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good; the headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is realising this rapidly with the help of a very good leadership team who together with middle managers provide effective management. The governance of the school is very good. Governors offer much expertise in terms of governance and are well organised.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are **well satisfied** with the school.

Parents' views of the school are generally positive. They feel their children are making good progress and are encouraged to work hard at school and are comfortable about approaching the school with concerns or questions. They would like more feedback on their child's progress but inspectors believe the school provides as much information as most secondary schools and meets requirements. Some parents would like a quicker response to their concerns and complaints. Pupils **like** the school and feel safe; they believe they are able to make progress as a result of good teaching. They do not like the toilets.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve key skills in literacy and information and communication technology and the use of ICT across the curriculum.
- Strengthen links with parents.
- Upgrade the presentation of the school, in terms of its environment, and the pupils, in terms of their dress code and their work books.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn independently and assess their own work.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement, including those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language, is good. When compared with pupils' previous attainment test and examination results were well above average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11, in 2003. Standards are in line with national expectations, overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in statutory tests are highest ever in English, mathematics and science.
- GCSE results have improved.
- Pupils' achievement is good.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are highest in art.
- Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well because they are supported well.

Commentary

Key Stage 3

1. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with attainment that is, overall, below the national average. However, the scores of those now in Years 7 and 8 are closing on the national average. In 2003, in statutory tests, pupils' average point scores were the highest ever and in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science. In all three subjects, results were well above average when compared with pupils' previous attainment.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.7(29.3)	33.3(33.3)
Mathematics	35.8(35.2)	34.7(34.7)
Science	33.8(32.4)	33.3(33.3)

There were 208 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Key Stage 4

2. GCSE results in 2003 were higher than those of the previous two years and close to the national average for 5A* to C grades (45.6 per cent). The proportions of pupils who gained 5A* to G and 1A* to G grades were above average. When pupils' performance is viewed in relation to their prior attainment, results were above average for 5A* to C and 1A* to G and well above average for 5A* to G grades.

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	45.6 (41.4)	49.0 (49.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	92.2 (92.5)	88.6 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97.4 (98.4)	94.6 (94.7)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	39.0 (37.8)	39.0 (39.8)

There were 194 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. Pupils' achievement is good across the school. However, by the end of Year 9, it is very good when purely comparing statutory tests in Year 6 results with those in Year 9. Pupils' progress, through the school, is sustained and rapid. Achievement is very good in art in all years and scores are well above those of other subjects indicating very significant improvement when compared with pupils' average achievement when they first join the school. The three-dimensional course is worthy of special note as it enables those less attuned to the finer arts to achieve high levels of success. In Years 7 to 9, achievement is also very good in history because teaching and learning are very good. It is good in English, mathematics, science, citizenship, design and technology, modern foreign languages and physical education. It is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9; non-specialist teaching and a lack of stability in staffing have led to pupils underachieving. However, in Years 10 and 11, geography teachers have higher expectations and pupils show more commitment to their work. Achievement is satisfactory in all other subjects.

4. Standards are in line with national expectations, overall. They are well above average in art, indicating that strategies to improve the performance of boys are meeting with some success, although it still lags behind that of girls. Standards are above average in design and technology and physical education in Years 7 to 11. They are also above average in modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11. Standards are well below average in geography in Years 7 to 9 and below average in Years 10 and 11. In these later years, low standards occur to some extent because the groups are made up from lower attaining pupils, many of whom have low aspirations. In all other subjects, standards are average.

5. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in most subjects. Teachers are aware of their needs and most support them effectively. Teaching assistants enable these pupils to achieve at least as well as others when they provide extra support in lessons. Pupils with literacy difficulties make good progress in lessons where they are withdrawn for extra help with reading and writing.

6. Because of the high levels of care, those pupils with English as an additional language achieve as well as other pupils. Likewise, pupils who are gifted and/or talented achieve well.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

7. Attitudes, behaviour and attendance are **good**. Personal development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive in the majority of lessons.
- Very good relationships coupled with good attitudes provide a very good foundation for learning.
- Attendance is good and the procedures for achieving a high level of attendance are very good.
- Bullying is a minor problem, mainly in Years 7 and 8.
- A minority of pupils shows poor respect for property.
- There is an emphasis on providing activities that nurture pupils' self esteem.

Commentary

8. Teachers and senior staff promote enthusiasm for learning through the inspiring curriculum provided, their own enthusiasm and their quality of teaching and this is reflected in the responses of pupils, who display much interest and active participation in lessons. This is accompanied by good behaviour and in particular an ability to get on well with each other and the teaching staff. These very good relationships are fostered by the school's promotion of good social and moral behaviour and reflected in the pupils' appreciation of the value and excitement of what they are learning.

9. Attendance is much improved and substantially beats national performance.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
School data 6.2	School data 1.0
National data 7.8	National data 1.2

10. There is very good collaboration with the Education Social Worker, who has been assisting the school for five years and hence knows his families well. There is a determination to beat the present performance and a good number of initiatives are in hand to support this ambition. Parents are concerned about bullying in the school and discussion with pupils and staff confirms this concern for the younger pupils. The school is virtually free of racism and other forms of harassment. When bullying incidents arise staff deal with them competently, but it is apparent that some younger pupils come into the school without the inherent respect for each other that older pupils have developed. Respect for property is also under-developed as exemplified by the litter problem and the abuse the school's lavatories receive from a small number of pupils.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	970	87	1
White – Irish	2		
White – any other White background	18		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	4	
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian	3		
Mixed – any other mixed background	10		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4		
Black or Black British – Caribbean			
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2		
Chinese	3		
Any other ethnic group	2		
No ethnic group recorded	21		

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

11. Pupils with special educational needs appreciate and respond well to the extra support that the school provides for them. They have good relationships with teaching assistants, who support pupils sensitively but ensure that they do not become over-dependent on the extra help that they receive.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

12. **Teaching and learning are good** across the school, marginally better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. **The quality of assessment is also good.**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A large proportion of lessons are very good and a couple are excellent.
- A few lessons have shortcomings.
- Good learning results from good teaching.
- Teachers know their subjects well.
- Teachers of pupils with learning difficulties do not always use pre-set targets to modify their lessons.
- Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to work independently and assess their own work.
- There is a good whole school policy on marking, assessment, recording and reporting.
- Although most departments have assessment systems which are well organised, some departments do not use assessment sufficiently to respond to individual needs.
- In some subjects some pupils do not understand how they can improve.

Commentary

13. In the best lessons, teaching is clear, logical and well paced. Any documentation is easily accessible by pupils. Teachers are knowledgeable and confident. They are patient with low attaining pupils and extend high attainers. All pupils are highly motivated and, along with the teacher, have a calm and purposeful approach to the lesson. Teachers are pleasant and insistent and learning is sound and sure. In very good lessons, class management is very effective and pupils are totally focussed. Pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported through dialogue and discussion. Both teachers and pupils exhibit considerable creativity when involved in the challenging set work. A key feature to these lessons is when pupils are led to understanding through investigation. Pupils work independently or in pairs or groups. They learn to organise themselves well.

14. The few lessons found unsatisfactory often start poorly; pupils are unsettled and global control is not established. There is a lack of structure to the work given to pupils and class management is weak. Teachers' planning is not helpful; their explanations and questions lack clarity and there is a lack of progression of activities.

15. Learning mirrors teaching. Pupils respond well to the care, dedication and commitment to high achievement of their teachers. They make considerable gains in their knowledge and understanding when they investigate a topic. They enjoy the research and creativity required. They experience some independence in their learning. However, they are not always given sufficient opportunities to work independently or to assess their own work. These are important areas for improvement as such a deficit inhibits pupils' academic development. Pupils also learn well in groups and pairs; they gain an extra dimension to their education by sharing information and producing joint outcomes. Teachers try hard to make lessons as varied and interesting as possible. Pupils enjoy their efforts and productivity is high.

16. Teachers know their subjects well. They have been carefully selected and are well qualified and able to teach around the immediate topic, adding realism and awareness. The school's very good recruitment and retention strategies make it possible for all subjects to be taught by specialists.

The only exception is in religious education. However, this is only a temporary situation; in February, the department will be fully staffed by specialists.

17. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good overall and enables them to learn well. In the best lessons teachers plan effectively to meet pupils' needs and involve teaching assistants in their planning. This was seen in several history and science lessons. However, in some other lessons, teaching assistants are not used as effectively as they might be because of insufficient joint planning. All teachers are aware of pupils' individual education plans but do not always use them to modify their lessons or help pupils to meet their targets. Teachers and teaching assistants plan extra lessons for pupils with more severe literacy difficulties very well. The work is based on good assessment of these pupils' needs and enables them to make good progress with reading and writing.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 146 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1%)	43 (30%)	59 (41%)	37 (25%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)	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.

Assessment

18. The system for assessment, recording and reporting pupils' attainment and progress is developing well. General advice is given to help departments organise their own systems. Details are given to each teacher in their school handbook. There is a whole school marking policy, which gives clear guidance to teachers, and they give advice to individual pupils. Departments assess pupils against National Curriculum levels or GCSE criteria throughout the year. At the end of the year pupils are again formally assessed and given target grades for the following year. The data is entered on the school system, and this is available to all staff. There is detailed analysis of the data, and this is communicated to subject departments. Some departments also have examples of pupils' work at different levels. Some departments have better systems than others, but most are satisfactory. They are very good in art, history and PE, but unsatisfactory in geography and ICT.

The curriculum

19. The quality of the curriculum is good overall with good opportunities for enrichment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision is very good for pupils requiring an alternative curriculum through a work related learning course, as part of the Increased Flexibility Programme.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- The curriculum provides flexible, varied and relevant courses for most pupils.
- Very good partnership links exist with other schools and colleges that broaden opportunities in the 14-17 curriculum.
- Good provision is made for transition into subsequent education and employment
- An effective personal social and health education programme is provided.

Commentary

20. The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities and activities to meet the interests and aptitudes of most pupils. It meets statutory requirements in all subjects but there is no daily act of collective worship. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, have good quality access to the curriculum.

21. The curriculum is very well organised and managed and is reviewed regularly by the school with the governors' curriculum committee fully involved in decision-making. Generally an appropriate broad curriculum is offered throughout the school although dance is not available for boys in Years 7 to 9. The teaching time of 24 hours per week is below the minimum recommended time having been reduced due to budget constraints. There is need to increase the teaching time provided in Years 10 and 11 to be in line with national norms.

22. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides flexible, varied and relevant programmes of study for most pupils across the attainment range including disaffected pupils and low attainers. The school has sensibly amalgamated with two local secondary schools in an Increased Flexibility Programme Partnership to provide a work related learning course in a range of subjects including farming studies, hair and beauty, leisure and recreation, hospitality and catering and construction for a small number of low attainers. These accredited courses run efficiently and well. They provide a very valuable contribution to the pupils' general education and skills as well as broadening the 14 to 17 curriculum offered at the school. The course has developed effective links between the local secondary schools. The school also offers good one-day off-site provision for about twelve low attainers at the Ryecotwood and Banbury sites of the recently combined Oxford and Cherwell Further Education College. This is well integrated into their weekly programme and has helped to improve the motivation of these pupils. Despite every effort to minimize disruption of timetabled lessons at school some non-core lessons are regularly missed when pupils attend courses off-site.

23. The school offers vocational GCSE courses as dual award options in Years 10 and 11 in applied business, leisure and tourism and in Year 10 in applied science. These ensure a good provision of vocational courses although the time allocated to these courses is insufficient to fully meet the needs of a dual award course.

24. A good quality careers education programme is offered as part of the good personal, social and health education carousel which prepares pupils well for making decisions about future courses and employment. All Year 10 pupils take part in work experience and pupils with special educational needs receive their statutory interviews in Year 11.

25. In addition to the National Curriculum, the school offers a wide range of enriching experiences for the pupils. These include lunchtime and after-school revision classes, sporting activities, musical and drama activities and performances, visiting speakers, educational visits and residential trips overseas.

26. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. There is a suitable mix of support in lessons and opportunities for withdrawal from lessons for extra help with basic literacy skills. In Years 10 and 11, provision is very good. Pupils with a range of needs are given the opportunity to gain appropriate qualifications, through certificates of achievement, the youth awards scheme and work-related learning courses. A daily homework club provides good support for pupils who would otherwise have difficulty in completing homework.

Accommodation, Staffing and Resources

27. The overall standard of the accommodation is satisfactory. Staffing and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The provision of the performance hall, the new music accommodation and the refurbished science laboratories has made a significant impact on the ethos of the school.
- Some of the older buildings are looking worn and are in need of redecoration and upgrading.
- The level of staffing addresses the work balance of the school well.
- There are generally sufficient teachers and support staff with the appropriate qualifications to meet the demands of the curriculum with the temporary exception of religious education.

- The library is well stocked and up to date but is too small.
- The ratio of pupils to a computer is below average.

Commentary

28. The school provides sufficient accommodation for the requirements of the National Curriculum, but in spite of very significant improvements the accommodation still has some limitations. The provision of the performance hall, the new music accommodation and the refurbished science laboratories has made a significant impact on the general ethos of the school, and is helping to raise achievement. However, in spite of the very efficient five- year rolling programme of redecoration that has seen many areas of the school carpeted, and many window frames replaced, there are still areas of the school which are looking worn and are in need of redecoration and upgrading. The school is to be commended for ensuring that all areas of the accommodation are now accessible to wheel chair users.

29. The workload of staff has been addressed well. However this has led to an amount of overstaffing which is being used creatively to develop the school further. Overall, there are sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff to meet the demands of the curriculum. However, the lack of sufficiently qualified staff in religious education has led to limitations in some pupils' learning. This is a very temporary situation. In the Spring, the department will be fully staffed.

30. Resources are satisfactory, overall. However, the library, although up to date, is too small and the extensive investment in ICT is still below average; the present number of computers is insufficient to meet the needs of a full cross curricular provision.

Care, guidance and support

31. Pastoral support is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good trusting and caring relationships with teachers, teaching assistants and other adults in the school.
- In Years 7 to 10 the information provided to class tutors on academic progress is insufficient.
- There are very good arrangements for child protection, welfare and health and safety, the procedures being well embedded.
- Good advice is rendered on careers and further education.
- There are good arrangements for the induction of pupils

Commentary

32. Members of staff talk caringly about pupils and the difficulties they may be facing and the school is sensitive to the diverse needs of its pupils and tries to find ways of helping those who are less effective at managing their lives. Heads of year and their class tutors in particular are interested in the progress of their pupils and follow up the resolution of problems assiduously.

33. In Year 11 class tutors have had a 10 minute interview with each pupil, reviewing their academic progress and helping them to assess their priorities. In other years tutors are not in a position to give informed academic advice to pupils because information is not available to them. Child protection procedures are thorough and all staff well trained. Health and safety are the responsibility of the Facilities Manager, who has produced some very good policy documents, the most recent being about external trips. There are good procedures for regular safety inspections and all the expected safety precautions are in place.

34. Pupils and parents both say that the arrangements for pupils' admission to the school are good. Eight schools were visited by their initial head of year and pupils invited in for a taster science lesson. Good liaison between subject managers and special needs staff ensures continuity.

35. The school meets the requirements for pupils with special educational needs, as outlined in their statements. It carries out annual reviews of these pupils' progress efficiently. Targets in most individual education plans are specific and most pupils know what they are aiming to achieve. The school maintains close contact with a good range of outside agencies that provide effective extra support for pupils when necessary.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

36. There are very good links to the community and other educational institutions and good links with parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good information to parents.
- Very good links with primary schools, secondary schools and universities.
- Very good involvement in the community.
- A small proportion of parents feel that concerns are not dealt with as expeditiously as possible.
- Some parents are not content with the frequency of reports on their children's progress.

Commentary

37. In one term of each year parents receive a full academic report on their children's progress and in the other terms effort grades for each subject are provided. The reports are factual, concise, rely on gradings to simplify matters and can be assimilated quickly. They are very good reports, providing national curriculum levels where appropriate and having targets for improvement. The effort grades give a snapshot of the current perception of a pupil's attitude – any consequent concern can be discussed with staff. The prospectus and Governors' Annual Report are of high quality. Very good information is provided about choices for GCSE, work experience and sixth form or college choices. Parents are given information about possible changes and are consulted by questionnaire.

38. Thirty per cent of parents who answered the questionnaire felt that they were not well informed about how their children were getting on – possibly related to the reduction in the number of consultation evenings compared with a primary school. The school has successfully canvassed parents' views in Year 11 about consultation but this has not yet been extended to the rest of the school. The view of the inspection team is that the school provides at least as much information as most secondary schools.

39. Some parents also commented at the parents' meeting about the slow response to complaints or enquiries. Heads of Year are generally sympathetic to parents' views but say that their teaching schedule often means that there is a delay before pupils can be interviewed, and point out that if several pupils are involved the time involved in getting to the nub of a problem can be measured in hours rather than minutes. It is accepted that increased interim reporting back would be desirable. Tutors only inspect planners once a week and these are therefore not a suitable vehicle for urgent matters. This advice is not incorporated into the prospectus.

40. Two deputy head teachers organise a good level of reporting to parents: there is one evening each year when parents discuss their child's progress with subject teachers. All parents have a full report once per year with grades and targets. If there is a cause for concern, the school contacts parents. Reports give details of academic and other progress and set targets for the pupils, and the information is generally good and helpful to parents. However, the academic targets set for pupils in some subjects are not sufficiently precise.

41. The Cooper school has good links with schools in the USA, Sweden, Estonia and Spain. There have also been links with France and Germany. In the UK there are good links with Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University, mainly for teacher training but also for teaching gifted and talented pupils.

42. There are very good links with providers of post 16 education, which allow pupils to make informed choices about their future education, which they do thoroughly. There are joint management team meetings with the other comprehensive school in Bicester, and the local schools in Bicester have formed a 'Learning Partnership' which works at headteacher, subject manager and specialist levels. It runs a Science Week and language network groups. It also organises the Children's University, a provider of after school modules on mainly academic subjects. This is evidence of a very good partnership.

43. The sports hall, the performance hall and the Astroturf are all part of a joint venture with Cherwell District Council. It is effectively managed by the school, but the administration and control of use is shared between the two bodies. This works well. The complex was the result of a joint enterprise between the school and the council. It is well used. The school has a very good relationship with a local machinery manufacturer and importer. Recently a group of 50 pupils from year 9 were invited to the company to see its facilities and asked to write curriculum vitae for a job with them. The company then marked them critically and indicated whether the pupil would have been called for interview, a very helpful process. Further examples of this very good community involvement are the school's policeman, the club run by the youth leaders of local churches every Tuesday, the involvement of the local chamber of commerce in careers exhibitions, and involvement in an after-hours arts course run in conjunction with The Courtyard, the local youth centre.

44. Parents are kept well informed of developments regarding the support and progress of pupils on the school's special needs register. They are fully involved with the annual reviews of their children's statements and termly reviews of their individual education plans. The special needs co-ordinator has very good links with local primary schools and this enables pupils to settle quickly into the school in Year 7.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

45. **Leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff are very good;** governance is very good and management is effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school; his strategic planning and financial control are very good and are supported very well by key staff and governors.
- Governors offer much expertise in terms of governance; they are keen to meet the necessary statutory requirements and are effective in this.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning by senior managers is good and has contributed towards the raising of standards. However, there is some variation in the extent to which heads of department are involved in the monitoring of teaching and learning.
- The recruitment, retention, training, induction and continuous professional development of staff are very good and allow them to operate effectively.

Commentary

46. Leadership is very good. The headteacher has established a clear direction for the school. His vision is being realised daily. He has built a strong staff during difficult recruitment times and is now endeavouring to further improve the site and accommodation. Pupils' achievement has risen as a result of such clarity and determination to make good staffing a number one priority. The headteacher leaves no stone unturned and has the dedication and spirit to bring about the improvements he has prioritised. A major strength of the headteacher is exemplified in his success in removing a very substantial inherited deficit. This, he achieved using very good financial acumen, controlling expenditure and rigorous planning of budget allocations along with successful searches for outside funding.

47. The senior leadership team offers very good support. They are well informed about school matters and contribute enthusiastically to any new developments. They are sensitive to the needs of children and put care as a number one priority, being quick to act if a pupil is bullied or in some other sort of trouble. Middle managers are effective in their roles and keep the school functioning well on a day to day basis.

48. Governors are very committed to the school. They are aware of its strengths and weaknesses and conscious of their part in its progress. They draw on considerable expertise, in terms of governance and education. They do not have a legal representative on the Governing Body. Governors are challenging and knowledgeable. They expect their views to be heard and taken account of but are also very supportive.

49. Teaching and learning across the curriculum have been monitored thoroughly by the senior managers and a well structured system of performance management is in operation. Both of these strategies have contributed to the raising of standards. However the monitoring of teaching and learning by departmental heads is patchy. A strong culture of professional development has been developed in the school through the provision of highly regarded initial teacher training, a very effective programme of induction for new staff and good in-service training for all staff. Strategies for the recruitment and retention of staff have been well thought out and implemented, involving not only financial incentives but also opportunities for further professional development in diverse roles.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,176,704	Balance from previous year	-66,052
Total expenditure	3,176,704	Balance carried forward to the next	0
Expenditure per pupil	2,983		

50. The management of special needs provision is good. A large team of well qualified teaching assistants is well managed. Pupils' special needs are efficiently identified and met. Appropriate priorities for the further development of provision for these pupils have been identified. The school monitors the progress of individual pupils well but does not yet use data well enough to evaluate its overall provision for these pupils. The special needs policy does not include criteria for such evaluation.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4.

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

51. Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching enables pupils to learn and achieve well;
- Good leadership and management have resulted in good improvement since the last inspection;
- Teachers do not place enough emphasis on the development of pupils' basic literacy skills.

Commentary

52. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is below average. In 2003, their results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests were in line with the national average, but much better than in similar schools. They are also significantly better than the well below average results of 2002. At GCSE in 2003, results were average in English but below average in English literature. This represents good achievement overall. Girls do better than boys; in most years the difference is similar to that found nationally.

53. Current standards in Year 9 are average, although there are few high attaining pupils. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, are achieving well, given their below average standards on entry. Most pupils speak clearly and confidently, but too many need frequent reminders to listen carefully during class discussions. Few pupils read widely but they understand the content and themes of set texts well. For example, many analysed relationships between characters in Doherty's *Dear Nobody* with good insight. They can identify and use features of persuasive writing confidently and are beginning to adapt their writing for different purposes. However, pupils' spelling, punctuation and sentence construction is poor.

54. In Year 11, current standards are average. Pupils are achieving well, having begun their GCSE courses with well below average attainment. They develop confidence in speaking to the whole class and improve their listening skills considerably. They show good understanding of themes and imagery used by poets in the GCSE anthology. Some write very imaginatively and structure extended essays well. However, this is in glaring contrast to their basic literacy skills, as their spelling, punctuation and syntax remain poor.

55. The quality of teaching is good overall and enables pupils to learn and achieve well. However, teaching is inconsistent and ranges from very good to the occasional unsatisfactory lesson. Teachers often manage classes very well. They build very good relationships with pupils and ensure that they listen well and work productively. They plan lessons well and use a good variety of teaching methods that interest and motivate pupils. They provide very good support and guidance for pupils that enable them to structure essays well and organise their response to literature clearly. However, occasionally, teachers have to spend too much time managing pupils' behaviour, resulting in a lack of pace in these lessons. Teachers clarify lesson objectives well for pupils in Years 10 and 11, but do not explain these clearly enough to younger pupils, who are uncertain about what they need to achieve. Teachers also mark GCSE work in more detail and provide pupils with better guidance about how they can improve. However, in all years, teachers do not correct spelling, punctuation or errors of syntax enough, nor teach these skills sufficiently in lessons.

56. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards and teaching have both improved. Good leadership and management of the subject have resulted in a noticeable improvement in the last two years. Good teamwork has also enabled the department to overcome recent staffing difficulties. Clear, appropriate priorities for development have been identified. Amongst these is the need to provide better opportunities for pupils to use ICT in English and the development of pupils' basic literacy skills.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Provision for developing pupils' language and literacy skills is satisfactory but lacks consistency in different subjects. The school has a draft literacy policy but this does not yet ensure that all teachers work together to develop pupils' skills. For example, there is a common scheme for marking mistakes in pupils' writing but this is not followed by all teachers, even in the English department. In English, teachers place insufficient emphasis on pupils learning to spell, punctuate and form sentences correctly. The best practice is in history, geography, science and design and technology. In all these subjects, teachers focus pupils' attention on key words and specialist terminology and help pupils to structure their ideas well in writing. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to read aloud, or develop skills of skimming and scanning when reading. Overall, the implementation of methods to develop language and literacy skills is not consistent enough in English or other subjects across the curriculum.

Drama

58. All pupils study drama in Years 7 to 9 and it is a popular choice for GCSE in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, GCSE results were slightly below the national average.

59. Three drama lessons were seen during the inspection. Pupils achieved well in all lessons. By Year 9, pupils have developed a good understanding of dramatic techniques and conventions and are able to work well together, supporting and evaluating each other's performances with good insight. Current Year 11 pupils are achieving above average standards. In the lesson that was seen, pupils were able to portray fraught family relationships realistically and sensitively. They were developing a good understanding of difficult issues related to unwanted pregnancy, abandonment and an adopted child's search for her real parents.

60. The quality of teaching and learning was very good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and enable them to learn very well because of their good subject knowledge, clear explanations and very good class management.

61. Drama makes an important contribution to pupils' personal and social development. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in activities after school, such as the production of *Bugsy Malone* that they are currently rehearsing; Year 10 pupils work with students from Oxford University to produce and perform a play in Oxford. The head of department has introduced good assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 and all pupils know how well they are achieving as a result. Several rooms are used to teach drama. Poor acoustics make teaching and learning difficult and a lack of lighting reduces opportunities to respond to the interests of pupils who would like to explore more technical aspects of the subject.

Modern foreign languages

62. Provision in French and German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall quality of teaching is good.
- Leadership is good.
- Teachers work well as a team, producing good materials for learning.

- Teachers take pupils on visits to France and Germany, so that pupils can use the languages.
- Some teachers do not use enough pair work or use the foreign language enough in the classroom.
- Pupils need to check their written work more carefully to avoid basic errors.
- The department lacks sufficient text books, readers, magazines, and overhead projectors.

Commentary

63. Currently when pupils enter the school they study French or German, and can continue with it to the end of Year 11. Some pupils in Year 9 also study the foreign language they did not begin in Year 7.

64. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were in line with national standards in French and German in 2003. In comparison with national standards, French and German GCSE results were in line in 2002 but below in 2003. They were below most other subjects in the school in 2002 and 2003. However, it is expected that the 2004 GCSE results will be above national standards in both languages. Overall performance in the lessons seen showed pupils working at national standards in French and German in Year 9, and above in Year 11.

65. In both languages, pupils are stronger in listening, speaking and writing than in reading. Overall, there is a satisfactory amount of written exercises and sustained writing in both languages; however, pupils make unnecessary errors in grammar and spelling, preventing them from achieving higher standards. Year 7 pupils were able to read physical descriptions of people in French and identify them from pictures. Year 9 pupils could ask others in the class in French which household chores they liked and hated, and understand the replies. Year 8 pupils were able to listen to a German tape and identify food and drink items. Year 10 pupils could work in pairs on computers and create a German dialogue expressing opinions about school life.

66. There are no significant variations between pupils of different ethnicity, background, or ability. Pupils have regular reading sessions: these contribute to their general literacy and develop their skills and knowledge. Pupils spend most of their time using the foreign languages in listening, speaking, reading and writing: this contributes to their literacy skills. Numeracy activities have been incorporated successfully into schemes of work, and are used by teachers. Pupils have limited access to computers, but enjoy using them, and produce good quality work.

67. The overall quality of teaching in both French and German is good, and has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are proficient in both foreign languages, have good accents, and project their voices very clearly. They use French and German for parts of the lesson to develop pupils' listening skills. Most use a little English to check understanding or explain grammatical points, but sometimes they use English too much. They plan a well organised sequence of activities, which involve the pupils in their learning. Lesson objectives are shared with the pupils at the beginning of lessons, so that they understand what they are expected to achieve, and checked in plenary sessions at the end so they can assess how successful they have been. Time is used well, and some teachers are good at encouraging oral work in pairs: this improves listening and speaking skills. However, some teachers do not use pair work enough. Pupils' work is assessed regularly, and teachers base further planning on the results. Teachers manage classes well, and give pupils a variety of experiences in the classroom, including songs, role plays, videos and class surveys, which extend and consolidate their learning. They provide challenging tasks for the higher attainers, and give support to those with learning difficulties. Staff display pupils' work, maps, posters, and other authentic material, which increase the pupils' knowledge of the languages and countries concerned. However, more maps and display are needed in some classrooms. Learning support assistants provide valuable help to pupils and teachers in the classroom. Teachers ensure that all pupils make appropriate progress. Most pupils, including the higher attainers and those with learning difficulties, make good progress in lessons throughout the school.

68. The quality of teaching ensures that the majority of pupils behave well. They show interest in their work, sustain their concentration, and develop good study skills. Their response is usually good

throughout the school. Many pupils show an obvious sense of enjoyment in lessons. They work well in pairs, and sometimes have opportunities to use their initiative in creating role plays and working independently.

69. The organisation of the curriculum meets statutory requirements. The department is well led and organised, and has prioritised development plans. There has been good progress since the previous report.

70. Those in charge of modern languages check on the progress of pupils in French and German. The department is well led and organised, has prioritised development plans, and works well as a team to produce resources for effective learning. The department lacks text books, readers, magazines, and overhead projectors. Teachers take pupils on visits to France and Germany: this encourages social interaction and personal responsibility, and improves language competence. The text books and other materials used, together with visits abroad, help develop awareness of the diversity and richness of other cultures.

MATHEMATICS

71. Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good resulting in effective teamwork.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is good and some teaching is very good.
- Teacher-pupil relationships are strong.
- Pupils' achievement is good.
- Short-term planning/assessment setting processes are not rigorous enough to support teaching and learning.
- Numeracy across the curriculum is not well enough co-ordinated.

Commentary

72. On entry to the school standards are slightly below average. Results at the end of Year 9, in 2002, show that standards were average when compared with all schools and above average when compared with similar schools. GCSE results in 2002 were average. Pupils' achievement is good across Years 7 to 11. Results were similar in 2003. The standard of work seen in Years 7 to 9 reflects the pupils' increasing confidence and competence in all areas of mathematics. They extend their knowledge of number, algebra, and geometry and develop the skills of handling data and investigation. By Year 9, pupils in all sets have made good progress and show increasing understanding. During an investigation of 'sloping squares', pupils in Year 9 displayed advanced mathematical thinking skills. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are reaching expected standards and by the age of 16 pupils have covered all the topics of the GCSE syllabus at three levels and are sufficiently prepared for the examination. The higher attaining pupils enjoy the challenge of demanding mathematics. Year 10 pupils confidently solve simultaneous equations graphically and numerically and they have good understanding of sequences.

73. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is mainly good. Most lessons begin with mental starters, which allow pupils to reinforce basic skills or to focus on new skills. The setting arrangements ensure that the work pupils do is matched to their attainment level that they are challenged appropriately. Where teaching is good or very good, the teachers plan lessons with a variety of activities to help pupils achieve clear learning objectives. They continuously assess the pupils' progress and adjust questions, explanations and activities to match the needs of individuals who need extra help or extra challenge. At the end of these lessons the teachers inform the pupils of the extent of their successes and efforts. They are generous with praise for effort, which encourages the pupils to work hard. The quality of teaching is also good in Years 10 and 11 and results in pupils' good progress. Pupils at all levels experience challenge and display a mature

attitude toward the examination course. The teachers plan well and employ a variety of teaching styles according to the needs of the pupils and they are skilled in explaining new concepts.

74. In all year groups, teachers do not always use the plenary sessions to their best advantage; to assess the extent of the pupils' achievement of the lessons' learning objectives; to reward pupils for their successes and efforts and to assure those who have been less successful. Such assessment, if recorded, might also be used to help teachers to refine their short-term plans, to track pupils' shorter-term progress and to help the pupils in the setting of their targets. The standard of marking is good overall and most teachers include comments of encouragement and advice. In all years, teaching is of better quality than at the last inspection. Pupils who find mathematics difficult are sometimes taught in smaller classes and where such classes are larger, teaching assistants provide valuable support but they are not given the responsibility for teaching these groups under the supervision of the class teacher. Mathematics' lessons contribute to the pupils' literacy development through teachers' encouraging pupils to explain how they solve problems, as well as helping their understanding. Teachers explain key mathematical words, which pupils use with confidence. Pupils sometimes use computers to help support their work in geometry, in handling data and for word processing but few opportunities are taken for classes to work in the school's computer suites. Teachers frequently address pupils' personal development in mathematics lessons but as such opportunities are not identified in the schemes of work, they are sometimes missed.

75. The leadership of the department is very good. The head of department is a very good, caring teacher and leader. He has established a strong team of conscientious teachers who are supportive of each other in their determined efforts to raise standards further. All the mathematics teachers are good role models for the pupils. They work hard themselves, they set the pupils high expectations of effort and behaviour and they are courteous. The pupils respond similarly. They are polite and hard working. The management of the department is good but there is room for improvement such as more rigorous monitoring and planning. The subject development plan focuses on raising standards and has identified appropriate areas for development but it does not make clear how and when action will be taken to bring about the improvements. While long-term curriculum planning is good, uniform short-term planning, assessment and target setting are not yet established. A strictly timed action plan focusing on the programmes of study for Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 will ensure continued improvement of the department and help raise standards.

Numeracy across the school

76. Pupils' skills in number allow them to enhance their learning in a variety of subjects across the curriculum and their use of numeracy in other subjects supports their work in mathematics lessons. In science the pupils' numeracy skills are used effectively to collect and interpret data, to take measurements and to make various calculations. The pupils use their numerical skills equally well in design technology and business studies. Their use of numeracy in geography, however, especially graph work is unsatisfactory.

77. Subject leaders are aware of the need to prepare 'numeracy' policies and some have done so. The mathematics department has already provided training in the use of numeracy across the curriculum but there is no reference handbook to advise other subjects' leaders on preferred numeracy-teaching methods. An audit of the extent of the use of numeracy in other subjects has yet to take place to identify where and when particular topics are being taught. The head of the mathematics department has identified the need to appoint a team member to be responsible for the co-ordination of the teaching of numeracy in other subjects to ensure a consistent approach to topics like graphs and to inform the department's planning to provide reinforcement work or to avoid unnecessary repetition.

SCIENCE

78. Provision in science is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in Years 7 to 9 have improved since the last inspection and pupils achieve well.
- Leadership and management are good and provide a clear vision for raising standards.
- Teaching is good and pupils learn well.
- Teachers demonstrate good relationships with pupils by treating them with respect and listening to them.
- Pupils do not use information and communication technology to collect, record and analyse experimental data.
- The use of pupil target setting and pupil self-evaluation is in the early stages of development.

Commentary

79. In the 2003 tests at the end of Year 9, results were in line with the national average and the number of pupils obtaining higher levels improved significantly in comparison with the previous year. This represents an improvement on the last inspection. Over the last 3 years results have improved in line with the national trend. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were below the national average. However, in the last three years results have improved slightly.

80. The standards seen in Years 7 to 9 were average. High attaining pupils in Year 9 can write symbolic chemical equations for simple chemical reactions and know how sound waves of different frequencies can be represented by the waveform on a cathode ray oscilloscope. Middle attainers understand the key features of respiration very well. The standards seen in Years 10 and 11 were also average. Lower attaining pupils in Year 11 know the importance of fossils in providing evidence to support Darwin's theory of evolution. However, although they know how natural selection works they are not too clear about the part played by genetic variation and mutation within a particular species. High attaining Year 11 pupils are able to use relative mass formulae effectively in chemical reaction calculations but some middle attaining pupils have problems drawing the line of best fit in graph work.

81. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average overall but by the time they reach Year 9 it is average and this represents good progress. Pupils are achieving less well in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is average but at the end of Year 11 it is below average and this represents unsatisfactory progress. Instability in relation to staffing over the last few years, particularly with regard to the continuity of coursework has played a significant part in this.

82. Teaching and learning are good overall. Good teaching was seen in all years and some very good teaching was seen in Years 7, 10 and 11. As a result pupils of all capabilities achieve well in lessons. The main strengths of the teaching seen were planning, subject knowledge, methodology, relationships with pupils and care for pupils, particularly in addressing individual learning needs and in ensuring the highest standards of safety. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. In a Year 7 lesson on classifying invertebrates the teacher's enthusiasm and high expectations inspired pupils and encouraged them to work through a variety of hierarchical activities starting with classifying a group of invertebrates as arthropods, echinoderms or molluscs. The teacher established very high expectations of behaviour and productivity and the lesson quickly moved on to the next activity which involved pupils identifying different features of arthropods, molluscs, echinoderms, annelids, flatworms, roundworms and sponges. The teacher used a range of techniques to ensure pupils were on task all the time working to their full potential. These exercises were underpinned by the excellent relationships that had been established with the group over the term. Not only did pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of this topic they also developed their reasoning and research skills and their capacity to learn independently. Less

successful lessons often lacked pace and challenge. The teaching of literacy and numeracy was generally good and whilst a very good example of computer modelling was used to teach the factors affecting population growth, the use of data logging to collect and analyse experimental results has not been developed. Teachers assess well on a day to day basis but pupils' self assessment and knowledge of their performance levels in relation to national standards is only in its early stages of development.

83. The leadership and management of the department are good. Although the head of science has only been in post for a short time she has a clear vision for improving results and knows what needs to be done. A clear departmental plan is focused on raising achievement and homework is used consistently to raise standards. The collection and analysis of assessment data has been used to inform curriculum planning and a number of initiatives such as GCSE Applied Science have been built into the new science curriculum with detailed schemes of work in place. These areas that are now being addressed represent a clear improvement on the last inspection.

Information and communication technology

84. Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Commitment of senior management to the development of information and communication technology is high.
- The improvement in resources since last inspection is having a positive effect on standards.
- Good quality teaching.
- Student enthusiasm for the subject.
- Monitoring and evaluation of student progress is as yet insecure.
- The range of opportunities in ICT across subjects is under-developed.

85. Resources in ICT have been dramatically improved recently and although standards at end of Year 9 are just below those expected nationally, improved resources are having a positive effect on raising standards. No examination courses were studied in Year 11 and the school has introduced a non-examination course in Year 10 with plans for an examination course in Year 11. Student experiences of ICT when they arrive in the school are varied. However given that standards of attainment on entry for the majority are below the national average, progress is good especially when students are able to use ICT to advance study in other subjects. There are inconsistencies across the school in ICT resources; as a result ICT across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

86. The overall quality of teaching is good. Most staff are at a relatively early stage in their own competence and familiarity, but this is not preventing them from communicating confidence and high expectations to all pupils, who respond well. Pupils are always clear about learning intentions and teachers well focused on supporting pupils. Teachers are enthusiastic and making effective use of interactive whiteboards to demonstrate teaching points and enrich classroom delivery. Work indicates that pupils are developing some knowledge and skills by doing set tasks, but little indication that the school is providing sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their acquired knowledge and skills independently. Most pupils can search the Internet for particular topics; being confident users of word processing they then present that information for their own purposes. There is no secure system for monitoring student achievement across the subject

87. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is good leadership from the senior management who have a clear vision on the development of ICT. There are comprehensive plans to build an effective learning environment and appropriate actions have been taken to pave the way to realise the long term vision for ICT development. The school is well aware of the strengths and areas for development and there is enthusiasm and commitment to improve standards in the subject. The current situation is one of steady and staged improvement.

88. The use of ICT across the curriculum is under-developed. Students are not getting enough opportunities to practise and develop their skills outside ICT lessons. The school has made a considerable investment in ICT and the ratio of computers is now 1:8. Equality of access to resources is an issue the school is addressing. ICT accommodation in some areas is restrictive making it difficult to work with students of secondary age. Some rooms are awkward shapes so that all pupils do not easily see demonstrations by the teacher. In some rooms computers are very close and students have insufficient room to work.

HUMANITIES

Geography

89. Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weakness

- Standards of work, including in the GCSE examinations, are not high enough.
- Lack of stability in staffing and specialist teaching has led to underachievement in Years 7 to 9.
- Relationships are very good and most pupils' attitudes to work are generally good.
- Fieldwork projects produce very effective learning but ICT plans need implementing.
- Assessment is underdeveloped, especially the targeting and tracking of pupils' progress.
- Subject priorities are not implemented satisfactorily and standards suffer.

Commentary

90. Although provision in geography is just satisfactory, there is a great deal to be done to bring the subject into line with others in the school. The 2003 GCSE examination average point scores were lower than in 2002. This was partially due to the low academic profile group of pupils who opted for the subject. Results recently have varied but the overall trend when compared with the national is downwards. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades is very low but the overall pass rate is above the national average. Boys perform as well as girls but pupils do not do as well in geography at GCSE as they do in their other subjects.

91. In Year 9 standards are well below the national average and achievement over Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. Split classes in the past, non-specialist teaching and a lack of stability in staffing have led to many pupils underachieving. Much teaching lacks pace and challenge and pupils work too slowly. However, in Year 7 pupils are making satisfactory progress overall although variations are evident between classes. By Year 9 pupils have a basic grounding in geographical skills. Map work is satisfactory but the accurate graphical plotting of statistical data is weak. Knowledge of place is insecure and there is very limited understanding that similar environments worldwide usually have similar characteristics. Higher attainers including the gifted and talented are not stretched enough. Average and lower attainers achieve more in line with expectations. Support for pupils with special educational needs) is insufficient but when available it helps pupils make good progress.

92. By the end of Year 11 standards are below average but above those in the most recent GCSE examination results. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory as teachers have higher expectations and pupils show more urgency in their work. Best independent study GCSE projects show good endeavour and good standards. However, some pupils, due to low aspirations, do not produce the work of which they are capable. There are not enough revision materials, regular testing of pupils' understanding of work covered and pupils attending after-school support sessions.

93. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and sometimes good or very good. There was a little unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers are supportive and caring of their pupils. Teachers communicate their knowledge well. Management and control is generally good. Lessons are suitably planned and structured although a clearer focus on knowledge, understanding and skills is needed.

94. Relationships are very good and teachers deal with potentially difficult pupils through good rapport. Pupils rely far too much on their teachers who do too much for them. There is insufficient paired and group discussion and independent learning. Best teaching occurs when lessons offer a variety of suitable practical activities supported by visual presentation as it results in better understanding. Learning is limited by insufficient use of local Ordnance Survey maps, local examples and atlases to help pupils understanding of spatial patterns. In many lessons learning suffers when teachers do not take sufficient time to place the lesson fully in the context of previous study and ensure that prior learning is secure. Work tasks in lessons are not always appropriate to pupils' attainment levels.

95. The subject is satisfactorily led. Staffing is now stable and staff work well together as a team. The management of the subject provides a mixed picture. The subject development plan and department annual reviews are well evaluated but curricular planning and the implementation of areas for improvement are unsatisfactory. Assessment procedures are less than satisfactory as there is no consistent marking policy evident and comments on pupils' work do not identify how pupils can further improve their work. There is inadequate monitoring of pupils' performance and tracking of pupils' progress against individual learning targets. A coherent planned programme of ICT exists but a lack of access to computers has curtailed its full implementation. Fieldwork undertaken locally in Bicester and in Swanage and Norfolk provides most effective learning and greatly stimulates pupils' interest in the subject. Resources are satisfactory but there are serious shortfalls in lack of a fieldwork budget and an overhead projector and video monitor in each specialist teaching room. There is unsatisfactory improvement in the raising of standards since the previous inspection. There is now sound capacity and clear intent to take action on the points raised in this report.

History

96. Provision for history is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent leadership and management of the department, which has had a significant effect on the rise in standards.
- The involvement of pupils in assessment of their work and setting targets is exemplary.
- Teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject are very good.
- Girls have made a significant improvement in their attainment across all years but that of boys is falling below that of girls.
- Poor literacy skills of lower attaining pupils hamper their progress.
- Pupils have insufficient access to information technology to support their learning.

Commentary

97. There has been very good improvement in standards. Standards of attainment are satisfactory. GCSE results in 2003 have improved significantly since 2002 and are now just below the national average. Girls attained very good results, both in comparison with 2002 results and those of the boys. Boys have improved, but their results remain well below the national average. In 2003, the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show that, when their prior attainment is taken into account, pupils make very good progress. Girls have made significant improvement this year and their results are above the national average. Boys are just below the national average. The standard of attainment of boys is falling below that of the girls across all years. Standards, in lessons and workbooks, show that highest attaining pupils are improving their writing skills because of very good teaching. Lowest attaining pupils have difficulty with written work because of their low levels of basic literacy skills.

98. Pupils are achieving well because teaching and learning are very good. By the end of Year 9 pupils have a good understanding of the history they have studied. This is because of the very good teaching strategies which teachers adopt to match pupils' learning styles. The pace and planning of

lessons keeps pupils interested and focused. Relationships between the teachers and pupils are very good and produce very positive attitudes to learning. The majority of pupils have a good understanding of chronology, reinforced by teachers through precise questioning. They have good understanding of the events leading up to the Spanish Armada and higher attaining pupils can relate the events in 1588 to the Reformation in the reign of Henry VIII. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and provide work that is stimulating and challenging. Younger pupils identify varieties of castles and describe what is significant about them. They are encouraged to research their work through the internet and, as a result, produce examples of a range of castles in the United Kingdom. Independent learning is encouraged and pupils concentrate well, both individually and in pairs and groups. Older pupils find informed answers to problems set by the teacher. They analyse sources and make inferences about the history of medicine. In a very few lessons more stimulating resources could be used. Greater opportunities should be made for pupils to access ICT to support their learning.

99. Leadership and management are excellent and have had a significant effect on the raising of standards for all pupils. The new head of department is building on the very good work of the previous subject head and has a clear vision for the department. She provides a very good role model through her own teaching for other staff and pupils. Monitoring of teaching and learning in the department is very good. Particularly good use is made of data from departmental results, which is meticulously analysed and effectively used to support and develop the curriculum. Target setting for pupils is also exemplary. Pupils are all fully involved in setting their own targets for improvement. They are very well informed as to what they need to do to improve.

100. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Good progress has been made in challenging the highest attainers to improve their performance. Teaching and assessment are now very good. There remains a need for pupils to have greater access to ICT and lower attainers need more support to improve their writing skills.

Religious Education

101. The provision for religious education is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good results in the GCSE examinations in 2003.
- There is a good choice of courses in Years 10 and 11.
- Some of the teaching is very good.
- A significant amount of the teaching is done by non-specialist teachers and this is having an effect on some of the pupils learning.
- The management of pupils in some classes is unsatisfactory.
- In some lessons, there is insufficient provision in the form of work of differing difficulty for the less able and more able pupils.

Commentary

102. Standards attained by pupils in the examinations in 2003 are well above the national average. About 77 per cent of pupils gained the higher grades of A* to C. 100 per cent gained the grades A* to G. The results are a significant improvement on previous years. The standards seen during the inspection are broadly in line with the average but with significant variations above and below this. In general pupils have a sound basic grasp of many aspects of Christianity and they can relate this knowledge to a range of philosophical and ethical questions. The pupils also have a knowledge and understanding of some aspects of a second religion such as Islam. Where standards are above average, the pupils can talk fluently and with a knowledgeable confidence about topics such as the problem of evil. In general the pupils verbal skills are stronger than their written skills.

103. The standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are broadly average but with some significant variation both above and below this. The pupils have a good knowledge of a range of world religions, including Judaism and Islam. Where standards are average and above, the pupils can relate this to many aspects of believers' lives today. In many instances, pupils can see how their learning might have relevance to their own lives and experiences. Their verbal skills are good but their written skills are less so. Overall there is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Based on the levels at which they come into school, the achievement of most pupils is at least satisfactory and often good. The progress of pupils, who have special educational needs and who have English as an additional language, is satisfactory.

104. Teaching is good overall, but with some very good teaching and some that is unsatisfactory. All lessons are well prepared and they include strong content drawn from world religions. The lessons provide good opportunity for the pupils to learn from religions as well as learn about them. Where the teaching is very good, this content is put across effectively and high demands are made on the pupils, both in terms of learning and behaviour. Where the teaching is satisfactory or less than good, the learning is much weaker due to lack of confidence in the subject matter or where the content is not put across clearly enough. Often the management of the pupils in these lessons is less than satisfactory and so many pupils do not apply themselves to their work. Across some of the teaching, insufficient provision in the form of work of differing complexity is made for the range of abilities in the classes. Homework is set and an assessment policy is in place. There is some inconsistency in the marking of pupils work. The use of information technology is in the early stages of development. The good and very good teaching makes a strong contribution to the pupils, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Many lessons make a good contribution to the development of literacy skills.

105. The head of department has been in post for a short time. The leadership is good and management satisfactory. Statutory requirements are being met. The staffing situation is temporarily unsatisfactory as about 20 per cent of the lessons are taught by non-specialist teachers. This is having an effect on some of the pupils learning. However, in the spring the department will have a full complement of staff. Progress since the last inspection is good. The resources are good though there are insufficient up-to-date texts. The accommodation is good.

TECHNOLOGY

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Leadership and management are effective.
- The new assessment scheme for Years 7 to 9 is comprehensive and effective.
- Results in GCSE are above average.
- Information and communication technology is limited.
- Workshop accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

107. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 is above average and pupils respond positively to a series of design modules and assignments. Pupils achieve well. Through the structured course pupils build up a bank of key skills in designing and making. The evidence of folders indicates sound progress throughout the year as pupils develop a wider understanding of design project work. Little ICT is used and some graphical presentation needs improving. Pupils are well prepared to observe appropriate standards of health and safety and hygiene. Pupils observe codes of behaviour and act sensibly in specialist rooms and workshops. Pupils are currently experiencing a new and

comprehensive assessment scheme which records progress and attainment in each module of work. Evidence of work in progress and on display indicates that pupils are achieving good quality practical work as they develop personal interests and needs.

108. Attainment by end of Year 11 is above average and there is evidence of work which is both innovative and reflects a developing personal style. Pupils achieve well. Design folders are generally well presented but there is little ICT work and the range of graphical techniques is limited. Assessment criteria are clear and pupils are made aware of the deadlines which they have to observe for the presentation of course work. Many pupils demonstrate their developing study skills and their confidence in tackling a range of practical tasks. Standards in food, textiles and electronics at the time of the inspection were good although staffing problems have interfered with overall course continuity and pupil progress.

109. In 2003, overall design and technology GCSE results were above the national average and some individual subjects were well above. Overall design and technology results are above the national average and some individual subjects are well above.

110. The behaviour of pupils is good and generally attitudes are positive. Pupils respond enthusiastically to assignments and they appear to enjoy their studies. Health and safety matters are given a high profile and conduct in specialist rooms and workshops is satisfactory. Pupils use machines and equipment confidently and they collaborate easily when working in groups. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are good. Pupils with special educational needs are clearly identified by staff and work is directed towards their priority targets. Assessment of their work is detailed and overall they make good progress.

111. The quality of teaching and learning, overall, are good and there are examples of very good and excellent teaching and learning. The teaching team has experienced a number of changes and this has resulted in some lack of continuity in some courses. Some shortages still exist resulting in a small amount of non-specialist teaching. The current team of teachers includes experienced and competent staff who are committed to improving standards. Teachers work hard, manage lessons well and provide a range of stimulating assignments for their pupils. Teachers have contributed to the introduction of a comprehensive new assessment scheme and are currently revising schemes of work. The team has provided important support for the new acting head of department. Considerable change has been brought about in a relatively short time laying a foundation for real improvement. The team is well supported by two experienced and competent technicians.

112. The department is led by an effective, able and enthusiastic acting head of department. Administrative procedures are in place and the revision of departmental documentation has been meticulous. Good support is provided by the acting deputy and the team has brought about a number of important changes. Accommodation for food, textiles and electronics is of a good standard but workshops and the graphics room are not satisfactory. There is a shortage of textbooks, tools and equipment. The development of ICT is overdue, particularly in the areas of CAD/CAM and the teaching of graphics is not well organised. Display is an important factor in providing exemplar and stimulus material and staff are to be congratulated on the present high standard.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

113. Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weakness

- Pupils' achievement is very good.
- Very good assessment of pupils leading to appropriate curriculum for all.
- Very good knowledge of pupils and relationships with them.
- There is not enough systematic planned provision of ICT.

- Resources are not provided to challenge the most able pupils.

Commentary

114. Standards at the end of Year 9 in the teacher assessments in 2003 were well above average for all pupils at Level 5, though more girls than boys achieve the higher grades. The inspection confirms this and shows that strategies to improve the performance of boys are bearing fruit. Achievement at Year 9 is very good as pupils enter with, at best, very average knowledge and skills in art. By Year 9 the least able can understand the concept of surrealism in art and can draw a room in perspective and juxtapose the expected with the unexpected within it. The most able pupils paint using colour and tone very effectively and can talk about the influences of Salvador Dali upon their work.

115. Standards in Year 11 are in line with the national average in art. This represents a very good achievement as the art GCSE is an open access course taken by almost half the year group. Despite this, art gained over 21 percentage points above the school average for other subjects. Drawing, painting and observational skills are very well developed in the two dimensional (2D) art course. The most able pupils work to a very high standard but would benefit from experiencing an even wider range of materials. The three dimensional (3D) course enables those less suited to fine art to achieve a high level of success.

116. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning throughout the school. Experienced and artistic teachers develop pupils who learn the technical skills to work independently. Lessons are very well planned to reinforce learning, teach new techniques in drawing and painting and set high standards which pupils can then incorporate into their work. For example, a group of Year 10 pupils practised the art of using pastels to create light and dark through sketching glass bottles and folds in fabric, before using the techniques in their own compositions. Skills learned in earlier years are used independently and very imaginatively by Year 11 pupils to create their own 2D compositions influenced by 20th century artists who inspired them. Some pupils used tissue paper and withies to create very impressive 3D gigantic fishes which could have been created by a modern sculptor or artist such as Henry Moore or Miro. The knowledge which the teachers have of the pupils enables them to find the most appropriate strategies to inspire them and the high regard in which they hold the teachers leads the pupils to respond to the challenges set. Teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Art makes a good contribution to literacy and to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education though its contribution to numeracy is too often implicit rather than explicit.

117. Although pupils use information and communication technology for historical research, it is only used intermittently in their art, and is not yet part of a planned programme which could help to further extend their range of artistic opportunities. The highest achieving pupils could also benefit from an extension of resources to increase their opportunities for even greater challenge and independence.

118. Almost all pupils have a very good attitude to their art lessons and clearly enjoy them. They work hard, stay on task and choose to study art for their GCSE. In class they behave well, co-operate with each other and with the teacher. However, there is a small group of boys in Year 9 who are still reluctant to show any commitment to their work despite it being carefully tailored to their needs.

119. The leadership of the department is very good with the head of department providing a self-critical and reflective group of teachers who have a vision of art for all pupils. A well constructed curriculum and very good assessment procedures ensure that pupils know how well they are achieving and what more they need to do to improve. An additional 3D course has been constructed for those who take a single science and the department provides opportunities at lunchtime and after school every day for pupils who wish to do extra art or take an additional art at GCSE. Visiting artists and trips to galleries such as the Tate Modern provide valuable opportunities for pupils. The

management of the department is very good and the best is made of available resources and outdated accommodation.

120. There has been a good improvement since the last inspection. Timetable weaknesses have been eliminated, strategies have been implemented to address the disparity between boys' and girls' achievements and reporting to parents is now very good.

Music

121. Provision in Music is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved accommodation and allocation of curriculum time.
- Experienced specialist staff.
- Pupils receive a broad range of musical experiences.
- Inadequate use of time in practical sessions to ensure challenge.
- Insecure use of assessment to track and monitor progress.
- Insufficient opportunities exist for the effective use of information and communication technology.

Commentary

122. Since the previous inspection provision has improved and students in Years 7 to 9 have a weekly session with a specialist teacher. Standards are just in line with the national average in Years 7 to 9. In relation to pupil abilities, most achieve well and progress for the pupils given the wide range of standards of attainment on entry, including those with learning difficulties, appropriate or better. Standards for students in Year 11 have fallen but achievement in relation to starting points is satisfactory.

123. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory and good use is made of available resources to demonstrate points of learning. In all lessons observed teachers' subject knowledge and musical competence was good and lessons have clear learning objectives. In Year 9 most pupils are developing a knowledge of chord structures and using these to improvise. In Year 10 students are making use of a developing musical vocabulary and understanding of form and structure.

124. Although teachers are on the move checking and helping, the arrangements for practical sessions do not provide enough challenge. Not enough time is given for a review system at the end to reinforce what students have learned, consolidate understanding of task and ensure good links are made between activities. Marking and recording attainment are satisfactory but use of assessment information to review teaching and learning is not yet secure. Although pupils' work is assessed, insufficiently clear routines are in place so that the next steps in learning can be identified.

125. In general students have positive attitudes to music, most like the subject and relationships between the students and teachers are good. Use of information communication technology is at early stage of development. The large teaching areas, although not fully equipped, and the practice rooms provide good venues for lessons and practice sessions. Resources for learning in the subject are satisfactory and easily accessible to students and teachers.

126. Leadership of the subject has ensured that areas for improvement have been identified and an action plan for development published in the school development plan. Some aspects of management have yet to be dealt with, for example use of assessment to ensure work is matched well to pupils' levels of attainment, and the review of the scheme of work to set national curriculum levels for units of work. The department is taking account of the Key Stage 3 Strategy in planning and curriculum delivery. The school has worked hard to ensure all pupils receive a broad range of musical experiences and implement a relevant music curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are very good and all staff show commitment to raising the status of, and standards in, the subject.
- The good quality of the specialist teaching ensures good learning.
- Pupils are not sufficiently involved in planning and evaluation of all lessons.
- All pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not have the opportunity to receive dance lessons.
- Pupils have a positive and lively attitude towards physical education.

128. The number of pupils gaining A*-G grade pass in the 2003 GCSE examination was above the national average, although the number gaining the higher A*-C grade passes was just below the national average. The majority of the current examination pupils are performing at least as well with several very able pupils performing at the highest level. Overall, pupils' achievement is good.

129. The majority of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are attaining at or above the level expected nationally. Pupils are able to apply the techniques, skills and competitive rules to a range of activities of the physical education curriculum, most notably in soccer, basketball and rugby. Basic skills are well developed and provide a sound platform for further development. In gymnastics pupils perform a wide range of balances and turns using small and large apparatus with an increasingly competent ability to link them together. Many pupils arrive at the school with only a limited experience of dance, but quickly respond to the good quality teaching, and by the time they are 14 years old are able to demonstrate good patterns of movement and gesture which are performed with clarity and fluency. It is, however, of concern that although boys have access to dance through extra-curricular clubs, they do not have access during school lessons. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also performing at, or above, the level that would be expected at this stage. Most perform with precision and fluency, and work hard at improving their performance. In all year groups there is a wide range of attainment but teachers accommodate this through individual support and encouragement and differentiated activities, and as a result most pupils in all year groups achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated, given much support from both staff and fellow pupils, and reach levels of attainment that are commendable for them.

130. Teaching and learning are good, and a major strength of the department. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and teach lessons which are well structured and conducted at pace. Many pupils are taught how to evaluate and plan their work in school lessons, but in order to meet National Curriculum requirements this must take place in all lessons. Teachers have high expectations in terms of performance, behaviour and dress that result in pupils behaving well, working hard and achieving well. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.

131. This is a very well led and very well managed department. High quality documentation covers all aspects of the department's work and helps the delivery of the subject. Very good procedures for recording and tracking pupils' attainment are in place and are used to inform curriculum and lesson planning. The department has high expectations, and as a result of hard work and high levels of teacher commitment, these expectations are largely met. The school has gained the Sportsmark, which is a nationally recognised award for high quality provision in physical education.

132. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The department now has very good facilities for the subject and these are helping to enhance both pupils' attainment and their enjoyment of the subject.

Business and other vocational courses

133. Provision for Applied Business Studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Half of the pupils gained higher grades A* - C in 2002.
- Very high quality of teaching is normal.
- There are Insufficient contacts with other businesses.

Commentary

134. The particular strength of the department is the very high quality teaching. The area for development is for more contacts with businesses. The department is acutely aware of this and is working hard to improve the situation. No pupils were entered for public examinations in 2003. The results in 2002 were broadly in line with national standards, 24 pupils being entered for the qualification. About 50 per cent gained the higher grades of A* to C. The results are not dissimilar to the previous year. The standards of attainment seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 are broadly average. The pupils have a sound working knowledge of many aspects of business and they can produce written reports based on their own research and investigations. Their skills in information technology are more than adequate and so they can word-process their projects with ease. The achievement of the pupils is at least satisfactory.

135. Teaching is very good and excellent. The lessons are well prepared and the subject content is put across with confidence. The lessons are pitched at a level which is appropriate for the ability of the pupils and consequently their learning is very good. The strength of the teaching is the clarity in which the information and guidance is put across. This enables them to progress with their work in a purposeful way and it gives them confidence in their own ability. The management of the pupils is pleasantly firm. The pupils are very well behaved as a result and they work with enthusiasm. The teaching makes a significant contribution to mathematics across the curriculum and to certain aspects of citizenship. The department is very well led and managed.

Example of outstanding practice in Business

The well-prepared lesson was introduced with a calm confidence. The learning objectives of the lesson were clearly presented and this left the pupils in no doubt as to what they had to achieve by the end of the lesson. This calm purposefulness combined with a pleasant insistence meant that the pupils' attention remained focussed on the work in hand and they concentrated well and were able to maintain this concentration. Very effective learning was the result, both in terms of depth and the amount done in the time available. The most significant aspect of the teaching was the style of language used by the teacher. An awareness of the level of ability of the pupils meant that verbal presentations by the teacher were very carefully pitched. Clarity, brevity, and measured simplicity permitted the pupils to focus and not to be overwhelmed or distracted by too many asides. As a result, pupils felt that the work was easily achievable and so they could work with confidence. This economy of speech also made for a pleasant working atmosphere and this too helped the pupils to focus on their work and to achieve of their best.

Vocational courses

136. The school offers a dual award vocational GCSE course in applied business and leisure and tourism in Years 10 and 11 and in applied science in Year 10. There have been no GCSE examinations yet taken in these subjects. The applied science course has begun well.

137. Provision is **good** in applied business and **satisfactory** in leisure and tourism.

138. Standards of work seen on the applied business course are broadly average but on the leisure and tourism and applied science courses below average. In applied business and leisure and tourism pupils have a sound working knowledge of topics studied. They can produce written reports based on their own research and investigations. Skills in information technology are more than adequate to word process their findings when required.

139. Achievement for most pupils on the applied business course over Years 10 and 11 is at least satisfactory. In leisure and tourism in some classes where a few boys have negative attitudes and disrupt the flow of lessons, achievement over Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory but in other classes it is sound. Achievement in applied science in Year 10 is satisfactory.

140. Teaching sampled on the vocational GCSE courses was good overall. However, it varied from very good and excellent in applied business, good in applied science and satisfactory overall in leisure and tourism. Assessment arrangements are appropriate for the vocational nature of these courses. All courses are well led and soundly managed. There is insufficient time provided for the teaching of these dual award courses.

141. The school provides, as part of the increased flexibility programme, a work related learning alternative curriculum for appropriate lower attainers in partnership with two local secondary schools. The taught courses and activities are aimed at promoting pupils' self esteem and achievement and provide accreditation through the ASDAN youth award, the EDEXEL Skills for Working Life and NVQ level 1. A range of courses including hair and beauty, sports and recreation, and construction are offered at partnership schools, land studies at Warriner Farm taught by school staff and hospitality and catering offered at the school. Other courses include health and safety, first aid and interview skills. All pupils also study the core curriculum in Years 10 and 11.

142. Good and growing collaboration is evident between the partners and a strong commitment to develop the links already established. Good information, advice and guidance were provided for the 2003 course entrants. Very good provision is made in these courses. Standards of work seen are above those usually expected although variations in standards exist depending on pupils' prior attainment. Almost all pupils have positive attitudes to the course and attend regularly. Achievement is at least good and for many very good. Organisational and learning methods have been improved since the first year of the course and pupils are very satisfied with the course.

Personal, social, health and citizenship education

143. The provision for personal, social health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities within and outside school.
- The subject makes a good contribution to improving thinking skills.
- Pupils insufficiently involved in their own personal target setting.

Commentary

144. Standards are satisfactory in citizenship. The oral and practical aspects of pupils' work are of a higher standard than their written work, which is hindered by poor literacy skills. By the end of Year 9 pupils demonstrate that they are aware of the needs for rights to be balanced by responsibilities. They are encouraged through good teaching to think through the processes and consequences of decision-making. They acquire the key skills of observing, listening and thinking. Older pupils are beginning to have a detailed understanding of how democracy works and the importance of citizens exercising their right to vote.

145. Teaching and learning are good. Citizenship is taught within other subjects and in most cases achievement of pupils is good. Teachers provide a wide range of topics, for example, safety laws and legal issues in physical education lessons, examination of some of the moral issues of Hiroshima linked to the composition of music, and, in French, discussions on environmental pollution of the oceans. There is positive contribution to citizenship, and other aspects of personal, social, health education from Religious Education. Older pupils cover a wide range of topics to support their personal development, including awareness of the dangers of drug abuse. Sex education is well taught and substantially reinforced through the Bodyzone project funded and managed by the North West Oxfordshire Health Trust.

146. Pupils are given good opportunities to be involved in active citizenship through the school council, the senior student system, and the befriender scheme by which new pupils are supported in school by older pupils. The voluntary projects followed by pupils who join the after-school Focus Challenge Club have been very effective in developing a broad range of personal and social skills and helping pupils have a greater understanding of the variety of needs in their community and contribute in a responsible way. Very good international links are provided with schools in a range of countries across the world.

147. Leadership is very good. The head of department is energetic and imaginative. He has a very good vision for promoting the subject and is keen to promote older pupils to become good role models for younger ones. A wide range of speakers and organisations are invited into the school to support pupils' learning. There have been two audits to establish where and how well citizenship is being covered. As a result schemes of work have been adjusted to match the needs of all pupils. Planning is very good and involves all departments and subject areas. There is no provision for assessment procedures by which pupils can be involved in their own personal target-setting.

148. There has been good improvement since the last inspection as a result of very good leadership and management. Opportunities have increased for pupils to take more responsibilities in the life of the school. Citizenship has been established and now equips the majority of pupils to know and understand what it means to be 'a good citizen'.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3

Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	3
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2

The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	3

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