

INSPECTION REPORT

SLOUGH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Slough

LEA area: Slough

Unique reference number: 110104

Headteacher: Mrs M Lenton

Lead inspector: W J Powell

Dates of inspection: 9 to 13 February 2004

Inspection number: 259130

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

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Terms used in this report

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, pupils aged 14 take national tests in the **core subjects** of English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (**A-level**). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (**AS**), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (**AEA**).*

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective) school
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1112
School address:	Lascelles Road Slough
Postcode:	SL3 7PR
Telephone number:	01753 522 892
Fax number:	01753 538 618
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs A Best
Date of previous inspection:	27 April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This mixed grammar school is located near the centre of Slough, but serves a very much wider area, drawing its pupils and students from almost 70 primary schools. There are 743 boys and girls in the main school, an average size; the sixth form is much larger than average, with 369 male and female students. The school has been a specialist language college since September 2002. It has recently been awarded Leading Edge status for its work in learning and teaching, and is also a Designated Recommending Body (DRB) for the training of teachers. It has held the Investor in People award since 1996, together with Artsmark, Sportsmark, Curriculum, School Achievement, and Careers Awards. The area served by the school is a culturally diverse one, and has wide variations in economic profile. Overall, the socio-economic profile is broadly average. The main heritage groups represented in the school are Asian or Asian-British of Indian (37 per cent) or Pakistani (19 per cent) descent, and white British (25 per cent). There are smaller numbers (below 10 per cent each) from other white origins, of mixed race, and of Chinese, Caribbean or African descent. There are very small numbers of asylum seekers, and of pupils with English as an additional language at an early stage of learning. The standards at entry to the main school are above average overall. They are higher in English, mathematics and science than in most other subjects. Sixth form entry standards fluctuate from year to year, and at present, about half of the students come from other schools after their GCSE examinations. Standards at entry for the present Year 12 were below average; those for Year 13 were average. There are 33 pupils and students on the school's register of special education needs, of whom 8 have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. These are below average figures. The pupils are on the register mainly for a range of physical, visual or hearing impairments. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school in other than the usual years is, at four per cent, well below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3174	W J Powell	Lead inspector	
11575	C Fish	Lay inspector	
15849	P Buzzing	Team inspector	English 11-16; music 11-16
3643	D Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-18
22691	R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science 11-16; chemistry 16-18
10053	J Simms	Team inspector	Art 16-18; business VCE 16-18; English as an additional language
23848	J Chambers	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-18
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	Geography 11-16; psychology 16-18; special educational needs
23480	M Harding	Team inspector	History 11-16;
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Art 11-16; information and communication technology (ICT) 11-18
21975	A King	Team inspector	Modern languages 11-16; French 16-18
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16; citizenship 11-16
20395	C Rowe	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16
19913	R Garrett	Team inspector	English 16-18
14638	S Williams	Team inspector	Economics 16-18; travel and tourism VCE 16-18
27485	M Sims	Team inspector	Community languages

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is very good. Standards in tests and examinations are high, in the top five per cent nationally, with little difference between pupils of different ethnicity or sex. Teaching and learning, and leadership and management, are very good. The ethos of the school, and in particular, its tolerance and commitment to inclusion, are excellent. Value for money is very good in the main school.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The ethos of the school promotes high academic standards, in an atmosphere that values the individual, whatever his or her background.
- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership, refusing to see things as problems, but rather as identifying new challenges to be met. Leadership by other staff at all levels is very good.
- The curriculum offered to pupils and students is excellent.
- The pupils are very well taught by enthusiastic subject specialists, so that they are nearly always stretched.
- The school makes very good use of data, and of frequent monitoring of its work, to identify potential problems.
- There is a culture of innovation in the school, which embraces the wider community and other schools in an excellent sense of partnership.
- There are no major weaknesses in the school.

The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have risen, teaching is better, and almost all aspects of the key issues have been resolved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A*	A*	A	D
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	D	D	C	

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is very good overall. Standards of work seen are well above average and achievement is very good for the ends of Years 9 and 11; mathematics is a particular strength. Very good teaching ensures that boys and girls of all backgrounds and abilities grow very well in intellectual terms. In the sixth form, standards seen are above average and achievement is good. In recent years, the school's Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science have been high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Achievement in work seen by Year 9 is very good in mathematics, geography, history, religious education, and in art and design. It is good in all other subjects, except physical education, where it is satisfactory. At GCSE, overall results have also been high, although in 2003, results fell to well above average levels when the school admitted a significant number of lower attaining Year 10 pupils from a nearby comprehensive school in difficulties. This meant that results for this year group were somewhat lower than those of other grammar schools. The profile of achievement in work seen by Year 11 is similar to that for Year 9. With planned revision, results in tests and examinations are set to be high by the end of the year.

The pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent overall. Attitudes, behaviour, and attendance are all very good. The school is characterised by an exemplary ethos of racial harmony, mutual respect and tolerance.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching and learning are very good at all levels in the main school and good in the sixth form. This ensures that the pupils, already showing above average attainments at entry, receive the teaching needed to ensure that they widen and deepen their work in subjects, and so reach the highest grades. In spite of problems of recruitment and retention, most lessons are taught by subject specialists, who have high expectations of work and behaviour; this results in a good rate of learning. Teaching is very good in mathematics, geography, history, religious education and citizenship, and is good in all others, except physical education, where it is satisfactory. The breadth of curricular opportunities and pathways is excellent; learning is matched well to needs and interests. The school shows good care for its pupils and students; advice based on monitoring their progress is very good. Links with parents are good; partnership with the wider community, and with other schools and colleges, is excellent.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher's leadership of, and vision for, the school are excellent. The leadership of others with responsibilities, its governance, and the management of the school, are all very good. This is an innovative school. However, the governing body does not meet, in full, the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students. A major strength of the school is its accurate self-evaluation, based on rigorous monitoring systems. The school had already identified most of the points raised by the inspection, and in most cases, is already taking suitable action.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Pupils and parents regard this as a good school. Parents particularly like the fact that the school expects pupils to work hard, and that pupils make good progress. They are also impressed by the school's work to combat bullying and harassment. Inspectors agree. However, they do not agree with parents' concerns that it does not keep parents informed, and offer enough enrichment activities. Pupils see the school's high expectations and good teaching as particular strengths, but feel that there are problems with behaviour, and the way that they are treated by staff. Whilst inspectors agree that a small number of pupils can occasionally misbehave, they do not see this as having a marked effect on achievement. Overall, they found that staff and pupils get on well.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

There are no major issues that require attention.

However, in order to meet statutory requirements in full:

- ensure that all pupils and students take part in a daily act of collective worship; and
- ensure that the information provided to parents contains all of the information detailed in the most recent guidance.

THE SIXTH FORM AT SLOUGH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. The school admits a large number of students from other schools, many with below average standards, and offers them an excellent curriculum and good teaching that allow students of all abilities and backgrounds to achieve well. The ethos of the sixth form is excellent; it is a very purposeful place. The sixth form benefits from very good leadership and management, and offers good cost effectiveness. Plans are in hand to enhance cost effectiveness by working in greater partnership with other schools and colleges in the area as part of the Leading Edge project.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school admits a much wider range of students than is usually seen in a grammar school, and offers them a far wider range of learning styles and courses than in most schools.
- The sixth formers are very good role models for the rest of the school; they demonstrate great tolerance, respect for others, and have very positive attitudes to education in general.
- The sixth form is very well led; this is an innovative school that rises to challenges.
- Students are well taught, mainly by subject specialists, and they achieve well as a result.
- The very good use of data analysis and target setting mean that students of all prior attainments, and their teachers, know what is expected of them.
- Students receive very good support and guidance as they enter and move through the sixth form.
- There are no major shortcomings in the sixth form.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good in English literature , with good teaching that provides good support and guidance on how to learn. Good in French , thanks to the teachers' excellent subject knowledge and support.
Mathematics	Very good in mathematics , where standards have risen sharply as a result of very good and stimulating teaching.
Science	Very good in chemistry , where high quality coursework helps to contribute to very good achievement
Information and communication technology	Good in AVCE ICT , where pupils achieve well because of good teaching and the use made of on-line resources.
Humanities	Satisfactory in psychology , although some students could work harder out of lessons.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology , where good teaching allows students to gain a wide range of knowledge and skills.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good in art , where students are able to experience an unusually wide range of media, although accommodation for the subject limits what can be done in some areas.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in AVCE travel and tourism , where assessment is well used to promote learning, although ICT could be better used.

Business

Good in **economics**, where teaching provides a high level of challenge.

Good in **AVCE business**, where students on the 12-unit course achieve well; those on the 6-unit option do less well, often because of limited communication skills.

The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The advice, guidance and support provided are very good. Students benefit from careful guidance based on very good assessment and target setting procedures. The many students joining the sixth form are well looked after.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The quality of sixth form leadership and management is very good. Governors show a very good understanding of sixth form matters that is leading to a substantial change in the organisation and management of provision through greater partnership with other providers. The sixth form is very well led, for example in preparing for the introduction of the International Baccalaureate in September 2004. The management of the sixth form is very good, with close monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Some teaching groups are small, but greater partnership with other centres is intended to raise cost effectiveness.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students' responses show a good satisfaction overall. They liked the range of courses available, the accessibility of teachers, and the way in which they are encouraged to become independent learners. They were more critical of the range of enrichment activities, and how well students' views are taken into account. Inspectors agree with the strengths, but on further discussion with students, feel that the criticisms are not well founded.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

In the main school, standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Boys and girls, and pupils from different ethnic groups, show similar achievement and standards. In the sixth form, with its large population drawn from other schools, standards are above average and achievement is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils gain better results than would be expected from their standards at entry to the school; achievement is very good overall.
- Test and examination results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in Years 9 and 11 are in the top five per cent of schools nationally.
- In contrast to national patterns, boys tend to do at least as well as girls, and sometimes better.
- Pupils with special educational needs, those who are gifted and talented, and those from different ethnic groups, achieve appropriately well.

Commentary

Main school

1. Standards at entry to the main school are above average overall; standards in English, mathematics and science tend to be higher than in most other subjects. With so many feeder schools, there is a wide range of prior attainment in some subjects. Pupils and their parents feel that this a school where pupils do well; this view is borne out by its results.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	39.7 (41.9)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	44.1 (44.0)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	40.8 (41.1)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 145 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, results since 1998 have been well above average and rising at a similar rate to the national trend. In 2003, results were very high, in the top five per cent nationally, in English, mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys in English, but by a smaller margin than seen nationally. Boys did better than girls in mathematics and science, whereas nationally, they gain similar results. When individual pupils' overall test results are analysed, pupils did much better at the school than would have been expected from their standards at entry, representing very good achievement between Years 7 and 9. There are no significant patterns of results by ethnicity of the pupils.

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	90 (99)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	46.3 (51.7)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 115 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. The school's GCSE results since 1998 have been high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally, rising at a similar rate to the national trend. In 2003, results fell, although remaining well above average. This unusual dip occurred because the older pupils from a nearby school were transferred to other schools in the area as part of its post-inspection action plan. Thus the year group in question, smaller than usual, then grew by including a significant number of pupils who would not normally have gained entry to the school; this depressed results sharply. Overall, the results were better than would have been expected from the pupils' standards at entry to the school. Results were well above average in almost all subjects; those in English, mathematics and science were high. Overall, although girls did slightly better than boys, the gap is far narrower than the national figure. This reflects the school's work in recent years to raise the standards reached by boys. The school's own analyses demonstrate that pupils from the various ethnic groups in the school perform in a similar manner. Standards in GCSE examinations are well above average for the small number who took a community language, compared to the national average for other languages.

4. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average overall for the end of Year 9. There is little doubt that the final stages of preparation for the national tests in English, mathematics and science will bring standards to the same high levels as seen in recent years. Standards of work seen during the inspection are high in mathematics, well above average in English, science, geography, history, religious education, and art. In physical education, they are average, reflecting limited skills of performance, although knowledge and understanding are far better. In all other subjects, observed standards are above average. Overall, these standards represent very good achievement for the pupils concerned. Already of above average standard at entry, very good teaching has deepened and widened the pupils' knowledge and understanding on a wide frontage. Given that many of the pupils come from homes where English is not the main language spoken, this is impressive. Achievement is very good in mathematics, geography, history, religious education, and art, but satisfactory in physical education, because teaching does not always promote sustained activity for the whole class. In other subjects, achievement is good.

5. Standards of work seen are well above average overall for the end of Year 11, and as with Year 9, revision work is already starting to raise standards to the high levels seen at GCSE in recent years. Standards are judged to be high in mathematics and for those taking the GCSE in religious education. They are above average in modern languages, core religious education, and in design and technology; standards are average in citizenship, a new course, and core physical education, where time is limited. In all other cases, they are well above average. This represents very good achievement overall for the pupils concerned, based on their prior attainments at entry and at the end of Year 9. The pattern of achievement across subjects is similar to that seen in Years 7 to 9. Once again, pupils who start Year 10 with above, or well above, average standards are extended and broadened to enable them to acquire the higher order skills that are needed to gain the highest grades, across a wide range of subjects, at GCSE. At all levels, this very good achievement reflects very good teaching, including assessment, an excellent curriculum, and careful monitoring of progress.

6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in reaching their individual targets and also achieve well in nearly all subjects, performing well in tests and examinations. Their achievement in mathematics is very good. In physical education, they make satisfactory progress, along with other pupils. The most able pupils in the school show good achievement at all levels, but with very good progress being noted in mathematics, science, history and geography. They reach particularly high levels in mathematics, where many are entered early for GCSE in Year 10 and then proceed to courses at AS and in further mathematics. The school's plans for the future see such early entry becoming more common across a wider range of subjects.
7. Standards of literacy are well above average, although some of the highest attainers, drawn from homes where English is not the main language, sometimes have difficulty in the subtleties of English expression. Overall, literacy is well developed by subjects, for example through schemes of work, and teachers build well on this area of strength. Standards of numeracy are also well above average, and this reflects the high standards and very good achievement seen in mathematics. Although provision to promote numeracy in other subjects is good overall, it does not always recognise the potential for mathematics to enhance, and be enhanced by, work across all subject of the curriculum. Standards of ICT use are above average; most subjects now make good use of ICT in their own work, although some improvement is still possible.

Sixth form

8. The standards at entry to the sixth form vary from year to year. They are lower than would be expected from the school's Year 11 GCSE profile because a large number of students joins the sixth form from other schools in the area. At the time of the inspection, just over half of the students had joined the sixth form from elsewhere. This relatively open-access entry policy means that in most years, standards at entry are at, or below, average. The present Year 13 represented a broadly average intake, whereas Year 12 is below average by the standards of sixth forms nationally.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	87.7 (85.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	31.3 (26.0)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	235.6 (214.1)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 172 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. In the recent past, including 2002, the last year for which validated national data are available, overall Year 13 examination points scores have been below average. Females have tended to do less well than males; this reflects the fact that lower attaining girls are more likely to come to the school than they are to attend college, for family reasons. The 2003 Year 13 results improved, and are likely to be broadly average. The school has detailed analyses of how well individual students perform against predictions based on their GCSE performances. These show that achievement is at least satisfactory overall in almost all subjects for males and females alike, and for pupils from different ethnic origins. Only psychology deviates significantly from the overall pattern, because of non-completion of the course by some lower attaining students and weak coursework by others, reflecting a lack of commitment.
10. In work seen during the inspection, standards were above average, and achievement good, overall for the end of Year 13. Standards were below average in psychology and in the AVCE in business, although achievement was satisfactory in both cases. Average standards in English represent good achievement overall for the students concerned, who had experienced some staffing difficulties in the subject earlier in their careers. In all other subjects, standards seen

were above average, representing good achievement overall. Achievement was very good in mathematics and chemistry thanks to very good teaching that met the needs of students particularly well. The students who come from other schools often find the demands of sixth form work a sharp one. Provision for these students is now an improvement over that at the time of the previous inspection; they make good early progress in most cases. However, limited communication and planning skills sometimes continue to cause problems for a minority, for example amongst lower attainers in ICT.

11. There are no taught courses to promote the key skills of communication and application of number, although all follow ICT courses. Standards are above average in all three areas, although as in the main school, some students from homes where English is not the first language cannot always use the subtler English expressions in their writing, and this can limit achievement for some of the higher attainers.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The pupils and students have very good attitudes to their studies. Their behaviour is consistently of a very good standard. Attendance is very good. The personal development of pupils and students, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The racial harmony within the school is excellent.
- The pupils and students are highly motivated so their attitudes to school and attendance are very good.
- Sixth form students are effective role models and mentors for younger pupils.
- Language college status is starting to create a good international dimension to the school.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, resulting in, and from, a school ethos of racial harmony, mutual respect, tolerance, and personal dignity.

Main school

12. The excellent racial relationships across the school are striking. They ensure that everyone can work and relax in a calm and harmonious atmosphere, free from any form of racial harassment. This makes a major contribution to the high level of success enjoyed by the school. The pupils stress that the small amount of bullying that takes place in school is never related to racial matters, and that any cases of bullying are handled very well. The pupils show extremely high levels of respect for each other, appreciating, and standing up for, their differences. General relationships, both in and out of the classroom, are very good, with the pupils in particular getting on very well together. The relationships with staff are usually very good also, but just occasionally members of staff do not treat the pupils with as much respect as they should.
13. The pupils are highly motivated and want to do well at school. Nearly every pupil in the survey said that they are expected to do their best and they strive to meet this expectation. Their attitudes to school are very good; in classes these are often very positive even when the teaching is not as interesting or motivating as it might be. In most lessons the pupils work very hard, at a purposeful pace, and with high levels of focus and concentration. This results in lessons in which the pupils make gains in knowledge and develop their skills as learners. The small number of pupils studying community languages shows a very positive attitude to learning, as classes are at lunchtimes, after school or at the weekend.
14. The pupils' attendance is very good. Occasionally, parents request extended holidays for their children in their country of origin. However, the school expects parents to confine holidays to the dates given, with holidays during term time being requested only in extreme circumstances. All holidays are rightly only authorised at the discretion of the school and may be refused.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	5.8
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	1.1

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

15. Despite the pupils' survey analysis showing that behaviour is perceived to be a concern, the standard of behaviour seen during the inspection was very high. Pupils explained that concerns revolve around only a few others who occasionally misbehave. The school acknowledges that there are a very few pupils who do not rise to the very high expectations set. Assistance from the behaviour support team is sought where this might be helpful, with support plans drawn up and implemented. The school has a rigorously applied discipline code that is adhered to closely; in the last resort this may result in the exclusion of a pupil. Exclusion is relatively infrequent; the pattern is similar to that of the ethnic mix of the school as a whole.

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	274	5	-
White – Irish	10	-	-
White – any other White background	16	2	1
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	-	-
Mixed – White and Black African	1	-	-
Mixed – White and Asian	16	1	-
Mixed – any other mixed background	8	-	-
Asian or Asian British – Indian	405	9	-
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	205	4	1
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	-	-
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	45	-	-
Black or Black British – Caribbean	7	-	-
Black or Black British – African	10	-	-
Chinese	7	1	-
Any other ethnic group	32	-	-
No ethnic group recorded	59	-	-

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

16. The excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development arises because the school places great value on this aspect of personal development. The school is a valuable resource of ethnic, cultural and faith diversity in itself, and the life of the school fully reflects, enhances and enriches the pupils' experiences. As a consequence, pupils appreciate diversity, show respect for other people's values and beliefs, and show by their words and actions that they challenge racist attitudes or stereotypical thinking. During the week of the inspection, pupils consistently and constantly demonstrated that the school ethos is one of harmony, tolerance and dignity.

17. Spiritual development is a great strength of the school. During their time here, pupils are acquiring insights into their personal experiences that will be of enduring worth. Pupils clearly understand and value the non-material dimension to life, and the school works extremely hard at helping them to develop their personal beliefs and values. Teachers foster pupils' self-confidence and esteem by encouraging reflection, seeking their opinions, and listening to their answers and concerns.
18. Cultural and social development are promoted very well as part of the specialist language college in various ways. In addition to the main languages taught throughout the school, French, German, Spanish and Latin, there are also many opportunities for pupils and students to participate in trips, work-related activities and other study visits to a growing number of venues in mainland Europe, China and India. Pupils are keen to study a range of other languages such as Mandarin, and recognise and celebrate the linguistic and cultural diversity in the school. The wide range of languages taught, and provision in other subjects, help to ensure that young people are continually introduced to different countries and to attitudes and beliefs that are different from their own. For example, in geography, the international dimension is a strong feature, whilst in design and technology, pupils make bags and teaching aids for a school in Kenya. In mathematics, there are links with China.
19. The school's successful promotion of personal development could be seen during the week of the inspection, when the French parliament voted on the banning of the *hijab* and other overt religious symbols in French schools. Year 9 pupils from this school held a similar debate in their religious education lesson on the same day – although they reached very different conclusions from the parliament in France. Pupils argued fluently, passionately, and knowledgeably about whether the wearing of religious symbols should be banned in English state schools. They showed very high levels of understanding of the issues involved and, although there were some areas of disagreement, all viewpoints were accorded respect and courtesy. Pupils were able to articulate very well how others might feel differently to themselves. A particularly interesting point of the debate was when pupils discussed the hypocrisy of a possible French compromise that such symbols would be legal if they were worn as a fashion statement, but illegal if worn as a religious statement. This was an impressive opportunity for pupils to debate a very topical and sensitive issue, with an international dimension. They rose superbly to the challenge.

Sixth Form

20. Sixth formers show very good attendance, punctuality, and behaviour. Students also show high levels of motivation; attitudes are very good. Many have set their sights on higher education and know that they must come to school and work hard. Nearly all students stay on to complete their studies. During most lessons, students show the same high levels of drive seen in the main school. However, on some courses, such as the AVCE business course, or psychology, some of the students become disillusioned because the course is difficult for them.
21. Members of the sixth form provide younger pupils with very good role models. They may volunteer to be mentors to younger pupils who are experiencing a range of difficulties, from settling in to coping with their work. The prefects selected from their ranks are attached to form groups in the main school, and these are often the people to whom the pupils turn to first with problems. The prefects also help to ensure the smooth running of the school, such as during lunchtimes. The sixth form Young Enterprise group displayed considerable business acumen during the inspection, selling gifts and cards for Valentine's Day.
22. Students in the sixth form are provided with similar opportunities for personal development to pupils in the main school. They, too, show very high levels of tolerance and mutual respect for one another, and for everyone in the school, whatever their background or beliefs.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is very good. Teaching and learning are very good, whilst the school's curriculum is excellent, as are its links with the wider community and other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

Learning and teaching are very good in the main school, and good in the sixth form. Assessment is good in Years 7 to 9, but very good in Years 10 to 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is successful in ensuring that most teaching is done by subject specialists; their subject knowledge is very good.
- Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- There is hardly any unsatisfactory teaching, and even where there are shortcomings, pupils tend to work well.
- The school's own monitoring has already identified the relatively few shortcomings in teaching, and plans are being implemented to improve matters.
- The use of data to set targets and drive up standards through target setting is impressive.
- Marking is not always consistent in some subjects in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 159 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (6%)	43 (27%)	71 (45%)	33 (21%)	3 (2%)	-	-

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.

Whole school

23. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, with much less unsatisfactory teaching, and also more that is very good or better. As in 1998, the many strengths of teaching contribute to the overall success of the school. This positive picture reflects well on the school's leadership and management, given the problems that schools in the area have in recruiting and retaining staff. The school's strengths in promoting learning and teaching lie at the core of its specialist school and Leading Edge plans.
24. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well, as are pupils who are gifted and talented. Individual learning needs are well known and teachers use a range of methods to match work to their needs. As a result, the pupils know where they stand, and what they should be able to do; they achieve as well as their peers as a result. The teaching of such pupils is especially good in mathematics, history, geography and religious education. Teachers are also sensitive to the different needs and backgrounds of pupils from the many ethnic groups that make up the school community.
25. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment at whole school level is very good. Well-established systems and explicit procedural instructions underpin the school's robust and usually consistent practices for assessment and marking. Rigorous analyses of data and value added factors, together with its methodical use of relevant information, generate very successful target setting arrangements. These measures have contributed significantly to

improvements in external test and examination results since the last inspection, because teachers and pupils alike know what pupils are capable of doing in their work.

26. The use of assessment to respond to individual needs is very good. Assiduous monitoring by senior managers and heads of each Key Stage is a major feature in the prompt identification of underachievement. This enables them and heads of subject to act promptly in challenging and supporting individuals. Staff work hard to provide a variety of successful mentoring strategies, in both the normal school day and after hours. Additionally, pupils and their parents receive regular feedback on progress and whether it is good enough.

Main school

27. The overall quality of teaching in the main school is very good, and leads to very good learning, so that pupils who are already doing well deepen and widen their work, and so are able to reach the highest grades. The proportion of teaching that is satisfactory is similar in Years 7 to 9, and in Years 10 and 11. However, the proportion of teaching in Years 10 and 11 that is very good or excellent is almost double that seen in the first three years. The school's assessment systems allow teachers to build up, over time, a very clear picture of how well pupils should be performing; this is used to fine tune teaching. Teaching of the highest quality is not restricted to a few departments; very good or excellent lessons were seen in all subjects in the main school. The school has placed considerable emphasis on learning, rather than teaching, as being its core activity, and continues to do so, for example through its specialist school and Leading Edge development plans.
28. The school's teaching strengths stem, initially, from its ability to provide subject specialists for most lessons. This means that more able pupils are being stretched, and all pupils enthused, by teachers whose own enjoyment of their subject is evident. Such knowledgeable teachers use question and answer work well to promote depth and breadth of understanding by the pupils. Successful teaching deepens learning by asking open questions; in one lesson, complex ideas came from the pupils themselves, with the teacher asking little more than simple, yet demanding, things like "Why?" or "When?" or "How?" at crucial points. Such skilled teaching understands that learning does not require teachers to force-feed pupils. In the best lessons, the teaching offers intellectual challenge of a high standard; in many more, it leads to a growing independence of learning by pupils, who are discovering how to think for themselves.
29. For the most part, lessons are very well planned, usually around a three-part approach that sets the scene for the lesson, moves to a suitably varied range of activities, and finally draws together the threads of what has been learned. This usually promotes a very good pace of learning, and the pupils remain keenly interested in what they are doing. Most teachers also make sure that pupils know what they should gain from the lesson, rather than merely telling them what will happen. On occasions, pace is, quite rightly, slower in order to explore complex ideas in depth and breadth; there is sensitivity to the learning needs of the pupils.
30. In almost all lessons, there is a very good expectation of what the pupils should be capable of achieving; activities promote challenge for most pupils, although on a few occasions, the highest attainers could still be stretched more. The school's arrangements to stretch its gifted and talented pupils are not yet fully in place within all subjects.
31. Helped by the very good arrangements for assessment, the pupils' understanding of how they can improve is good in Years 7 to 9; it is very good in Years 10 and 11. Whilst procedures in Years 7 to 9 are good overall, the quality of marking in a few subject departments is not always as consistent or informative as it might be. All pupils know what their individual targets are; most understand how they relate to national benchmarks; and in most areas of the curriculum, what they have to do to achieve them. Whilst some promising work already exists, the school recognises that further refinement is needed to enhance assessment for learning as part of regular classroom practice.

32. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' effective reference to examination board mark schemes, their use of model answers, and the provision of extra curricular classes demonstrates the importance they attach to assessment in raising standards.
33. Unsatisfactory lessons are very rare. Those that are satisfactory, but no more, have a number of common features, also seen in the unsatisfactory cases. In several of the lessons, learning was better than teaching; pupils are used to working for themselves. Most of the satisfactory lessons involve teachers who have yet to gain qualified teacher status in this country. A common weakness is that the pace of work is too relaxed for the range of abilities present in the group, so that the pace of learning, especially for higher attainers, can fall. Work is not always planned well enough for the range of pupils in the group; sometimes expectations were pitched too high. On a few occasions, the teacher tolerated too high a level of background chatter, and this led, once more, to a fall in the pace of learning. Many of the satisfactory lessons also saw the teacher doing too much. For example, instead of being asked questions, pupils were told the answers. They did not always understand their work as a result. In several cases, the teacher talked too much, even when the pupils were supposed to be working; pupils switched off. The school's own monitoring arrangements have already identified these areas, and staff training is in hand to tackle the matter.

Sixth form

34. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall, leading to good learning, rather than the very good levels seen in the main school. This is because whilst the proportion of very good and excellent teaching is similar to that seen in the main school, slightly more of the teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory rather than good. This occurs for similar reasons to those seen in the main school, although class control is rarely a problem here. Again, satisfactory rather than good teaching is more commonly seen amongst members of staff who are relatively new to teaching in this country. Since the sixth form contains a wider range of prior attainment than the main school, the range of needs that must be met is greater. The relatively "instructional" style used by some teachers, including the use of closed questions, in the satisfactory lessons means that some higher attainers, in particular, are not stretched enough. In a few cases, the problem is made worse by cramped accommodation, which limit the learning approaches that can be used. However, secure subject knowledge remains a hallmark of the teaching. As in the main school, satisfactory lessons tend to have the teacher talking too much, and the students taking a relatively passive role. Senior managers are already starting to work with newer teachers to encourage them to allow the students to have greater responsibility for what is done.
35. In most lessons, however, good or very good teaching stems from teachers who know their subject matter well, and who use open-ended question and answer work effectively. As a result, students are learning how to think for themselves, and are being challenged to think clearly and precisely. A Year 13 French lesson exemplified the many strengths seen in the school, as well as the international dimension at work. First, the lesson was topical, dealing with issues of perceived racism in France. The teacher's knowledge of the subject, in particular of the legal and cultural context, was excellent. Expectations were very high. The whole lesson was conducted in French, including administrative matters; for example, the clear learning objectives were in French. The students were clear what was required of them and rose to the challenges, writing sensible modifications of their work, and overcoming their misunderstandings. The pace of the lesson was fast enough to maintain interest, but not so fast that there was no time to explore points arising. Questioning by the teacher was rigorous and demanding, and made good use of open questions; the students had to be accurate in their thinking as well as their French. One student was a native French speaker, yet she too was challenged because of the high quality of planning of this work.
36. Assessment in the sixth form is very good. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment continues seamlessly into the sixth form. Meticulous data analyses and value added procedures ensure that transition from the main school and other institutions is very smooth. Systems to chart each student's academic progress are very comprehensive. Close

monitoring by the senior management team, head of sixth form, tutors and subject teachers helps most students to keep abreast of their targets. Very good practices exist, both in academic and vocational subjects, for example, in mathematics, chemistry, art, economics, business studies, and in travel and tourism.

37. The use of assessment information to respond to students' individual needs is very good. The wide range of attainment on entry to the school's sixth form means that teachers and tutors have to employ a variety of approaches to ensure that assessment is both useful and effective. In most subjects inspected in depth, the students' understanding of how they can improve is very good. They know what their target grades are and, usually, what they need to do to achieve them by the final examinations. There is extensive use of diagnostic marking, model answers and assessments linked to examination board mark schemes to encourage and challenge students in their learning.

The curriculum

The curriculum is excellent at all stages of the school. Opportunities for enrichment of learning are good. The provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's excellent curriculum is broad, balanced, and well sequenced.
- Curriculum innovation is a strength of the school, and encourages very high standards.
- The effects of single sex teaching in some parts of the school have proved effective in raising achievement.
- The 14 to 19 curriculum is coherently planned, and meets the learners' needs very well.
- Statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship are not met in full.

Commentary

Whole school

38. The school provides an excellent and highly inclusive curriculum for its pupils, and this represents very good improvement since the previous inspection. All subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education fully meet statutory requirements. However, the school does not have enough sufficiently large spaces to offer a full programme of daily assemblies. Those that do take place, however, are of good quality and meet the requirements of the school's extremely diverse population very well.
39. The school takes every opportunity to provide an innovative curriculum, and to take advantage of new developments. In turn, this then bears fruit in high standards. For example, although there are already excellent programmes for pupils aged 14 to 19, the school is currently preparing to introduce the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form in order to raise standards and challenge still further. It is also preparing to change the point at which pupils take their national tests, and to be more flexible about when pupils can take their GCSE examinations, and is seeking to work more closely in partnership with other schools in the area, particularly at sixth form level. The two-week timetable already enables a variety of curriculum routes to be followed, and a wide range of subjects is possible through the complementary studies programme: oriental languages are offered in this way, for example.
40. Opportunities for enrichment are good, as is the planning for careers education and guidance. The arrangements for personal, social and health education, and for citizenship, are good. The latter is taught through a number of subjects, and good examples were seen in English during the inspection, where Year 10 and Year 11 classes were involved in giving oral presentations on citizenship topics. The school provides its pupils and students with a very good range of languages as part of the extra-curricular programme or as complementary studies in the sixth form, so that they also have good opportunities to learn Chinese, Italian, Portuguese or

Russian. There is also very good extra curricular provision for community languages out of school hours.

41. The school's ingenious two-week timetable enables it to make the most of its limited accommodation. Classes work to timings that often differ from those of others, including staggered lunchtimes, and sixth form students have an extra period in the day, ending an hour after the main school.
42. There is good access and opportunity for pupils of all ages, backgrounds and attainments. Those pupils who do not have English as their mother tongue are identified well, and the great majority of them achieve in a similar manner to their peers. In a few cases, such pupils do not achieve as well as they might, since the subtleties of the English language escape them at the highest levels; the school is aware of this and plans additional support.
43. Curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good overall. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. Curriculum planning takes into account pupils' specific learning requirements, and is well linked to Individual Education Plans, which provide clear targets, criteria and strategies to help pupils improve. Clearly focused and detailed planning for provision for gifted and talented pupils is leading to the introduction of enhanced opportunities for learning, but the development of special provision in some subjects is at an early stage. However, the good opportunities for early entry to GCSE in mathematics frees time for more demanding work at AS and in further mathematics. In other subjects, whilst pupils are identified as being more able, and the level of challenge is mostly appropriately high, no special provision is made. The most able pupils are not disadvantaged, however; they are reaching the higher grades in tests and examinations, although some could still be stretched further.
44. As befits a specialist language college, the school places great emphasis on learning languages and on links with other countries. The pupils study two modern languages, from French, German and Spanish, throughout the main school. They can continue to study these languages at an advanced level in the sixth form, and there are opportunities to study language units on vocational courses.

Main school

45. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 includes Latin, separate sciences, and discrete lessons in ICT and drama. All pupils follow a course in a second foreign language, and curricular opportunities have been broadened through the school's relatively recent designation as a specialist language college. The school makes effective use of the increased opportunities to tailor learning programmes to individuals' needs in Years 10 and 11; cases of disapplication from the National Curriculum are handled properly. Meeting the needs of individuals is effectively done through the curriculum: for example, experiments in single sex science teaching in order to raise the standards of girls' science have affected other subjects, taught at the same time. For example, the single sex music teaching that has resulted has been beneficial to both boys and girls, and teachers are experimenting with shifts of emphasis and approach in order to maximise the impact of their teaching to the separate boys' and girls' groups.
46. Pupils follow a suitable core curriculum in Years 10 and 11, complemented by a very good range of options. These link well with the sixth form programmes, creating a highly coherent view of the 14 to 19 stage of learning.
47. Staffing in the school is good overall, and subject specialists teach most classes. The staff, like the pupils, represents a very wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There are also appropriate numbers of good support staff. This is no mean feat, given the major problems of recruiting and retaining teachers and other staff in the area. As in other parts of its work, the school has sought innovative ways of ensuring that it has enough good teachers. Thus it is looking at how to provide housing for essential staff, it recruits actively overseas, and as a

designated recommending body, will be able to ensure that, after suitable further training, they meet the requirements for qualified teacher status in this country. The Leading Edge and specialist school action plans are now making these strengths available to other partner schools in the area.

48. Accommodation is satisfactory overall, although there are still some unsatisfactory areas that limit what may be done in some lessons. Since the previous inspection, several areas of the school have been extended or refurbished to a good standard. The development of the language college has provided extra classrooms, and has enabled curriculum areas such as modern foreign languages and mathematics to have classrooms that are grouped together. The school is currently developing a Public Private Partnership project to extend and improve the existing accommodation. This will be particularly useful in improving the currently unsatisfactory sports and canteen facilities, and to build key worker housing on the fringe of the school site. The school has improved accessibility by providing ramped access to classrooms on the ground floor. However, there is no disabled access to the upper floors, which results in pupils who use wheelchairs being taught separately from their classmates in some lessons. This is expensive in terms of resources, but does not affect pupils' achievement.
49. Resources overall are good in most subjects across the school. The strengths lie in the very good number of digital projectors in the school, the very good resources in geography and the very good library in the art department. Resources are unsatisfactory in some aspects of science, with poor quality microscopes and a lack of compatibility with data loggers, for example; this limits learning. The library is a very good learning resource. It is managed very well by the librarian and used well by the pupils, but is small for the number of pupils in the school.

Sixth form

50. The school offers a good range of subjects and of learning pathways, including AS and A-level, AVCE Level 3 and GNVQ Level 2 courses, in addition to re-sit classes for GCSE courses. This allows a wide range of students to enter the school and to achieve well via the various pathways. The school's senior managers look strategically at its curriculum, and are aware that plans to introduce the International Baccalaureate will necessitate further changes. A significant minority of courses in the sixth form recruits relatively small numbers of students at present, but the school feels this is necessary in order to sustain a broad choice of sixth form subjects. As a Leading Edge school, it is now working on detailed proposals to make provision more cost-effective by working in partnership with other post-16 providers in the area.
51. Through the school's participation in the EU Comenius programme, sixth formers at the school have valuable opportunities to meet and discuss with other young people from France, Germany, Italy and Norway. Students work on specific cross-curricular projects, such as the current one which involves the school with two schools in Norway and in Sicily on the theme of values in society through the medium of art, music, religious education and languages.
52. Accommodation in the sixth form is good. An existing squash court has been converted to provide two-storey accommodation for a useful sixth form meeting and social area. Staffing and learning resources are good overall, as in the main school.

Care, guidance and support

The school has good procedures and practices to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the pupils and students. Very good support, advice and guidance are provided for the pupils and students. Their views are taken into account well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils and students speak highly of the academic support and guidance they receive.
- Transfer from the many primary schools is very smooth and the pupils settle well.
- Very good child protection arrangements are used sensitively.
- Industry days and work experience give the pupils a very good insight into career possibilities and the work place.

Commentary

Main School

53. The pupils of all abilities say that the academic support they receive is very good, and is well targeted; this helps them to improve their work. For example, for public examinations at the end of Year 11, work is marked clearly against the examination board's schemes, an indication is given of final grades, and how this might be achieved or improved. Throughout the school, remarks such as 'see me' often result in the pupils receiving a very helpful explanation of where they have gone wrong and how to put it right. All this helps the pupils to understand how they are doing and see how to improve their work.
54. The school is very aware of its duty of care. Its procedures for child protection are very clear, and the members of staff are strongly reminded of their responsibilities in this area. The procedures are used sensitively but thoroughly. The pupils are well looked after in school because the correct policies are in place and are well adhered to. The school is very careful in its practice of risk assessment and health and safety. The site, however, presents a few hazards, such as some very uneven surfaces outside, the ramps that extend into the corridor and are sometimes a tripping hazard, and the tennis net posts left up on the netball courts.
55. Many pupils who transfer to the school have had good experiences of it before they arrive through the provision of language teaching in their primary schools, or through classes arranged for them at this school. More induction opportunities for pupils starting in Year 7 are provided here than is usual, including evenings when the pupils and their parents may see performances by older pupils and students and purchase uniform. This provision, together with that at the start of the year, ensures that the pupils settle quickly and well. This is seen, correctly, as a great strength of the school by parents and pupils. Once pupils have settled into the school, there are good arrangements to listen to their views, and to include them in further development. For example, when it was proposed to admit lower-attaining pupils from another school into Year 10, the pupils in the then Year 9 were consulted.
56. The pupils' understanding and insight into the work place are very well fostered through the Year 9 industry week and the Year 10 experience of work week. Both of these activities are very well supported by local businesses and employers, and by the local Education and Business Partnership. They help the pupils to assess what they might like to do in the future, and perhaps more importantly, what they do not. The organisation of these experiences is very thorough and ways of improving the provision are always being sought.

Sixth Form

57. The school takes as good care of its students as it does of its younger pupils. It rightly considers that it has a duty of care to its students and thus members of staff are as vigilant as

in the main school. It also shows that it takes students' views into account in a good manner when looking at changes.

58. The students also receive high quality support and guidance in their academic work. Regular discussions take place between students and teachers about work and what they need to do to improve their grade. Often this support is very effective, with the students making greater gains in grades than the average. Careers and higher education advice is of a high quality; students applying for courses this year say they were very well supported and provided with very good guidance.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The links with parents are good; those with other schools and with the wider community are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school makes very good provision for parents to be able to contact them and to find out how things are going, but some still feel left out.
- The language college initiative, and the Leading Edge programme, have increased partnerships with other local schools and the community, which are now of very high quality
- Pastoral and curriculum links with contributory schools are excellent.
- Pupils make a good contribution to local and national charities.
- Some aspects of reports could be better.

Commentary

Main School

59. The school's high reputation means that some parents bring their children to the school from a considerable distance. Parents are invited to meetings in school as soon as they are notified that their child has a place. These meetings are very well attended and are a very positive way of introducing the parents to the routines of the school. The school uses a range of methods to keep parents abreast of what is going on in school, including newsletters and more specific letters where necessary. The open door policy extends to the head teacher, who is available every morning, whilst other staff can be contacted through telephone messages, the school diary or by coming into school. The head teacher ensures she meets all pupils in Year 7 over lunch during the first few months of their time in school. Through this she is able to learn about them and their families, often making good use of the information to ask parents to use their talents to the benefit of the school, through, for example, being involved in working parties on particular aspects. Parents are sent two interim and one full report each year. The interim reports give a brief, but useful, indication of how things are going; the annual reports could provide more information in particular about where there are areas that need to be improved or what can be done to move further forward. A range of regular meetings between parents and academic staff helps to supplement this information. However, despite these very good opportunities for parents to consult with the school, some feel they are not sufficiently involved. The school already knows that it must advertise these opportunities more.
60. Parents support the school through the Parent School Association and the governing body. Good support for their children's work is indicated by the regular signing of the school diary and level of attendance at meetings pertinent to their child. The school has initiated an innovative way of involving new parents in the work of the school, through a series of workshops on how subjects are taught in secondary school.
61. The school has a well-established and very effective selection process for pupils entering the school in Year 7. A clear set of criteria is used to guide selection so that it is fair to pupils and their parents, and information evenings for parents inform them of this process. There are also effective pastoral links, particularly with the main contributory schools. As a result, the transfer

of pupils from primary schools at the beginning of Year 7 proceeds smoothly. Pupils and students join the school at other times, especially at the beginning of Year 12. They report that they soon become acquainted with teachers and school procedures, and are readily accepted by other pupils.

62. Curriculum links with other schools are excellent, and particularly effective with primary schools. Through the Primary Learning Zone, pupils from primary schools visit the school to take part in a variety of learning activities, such as languages, business, music, and keyboard skills. Further activities include a local consortium of music teachers, which ensures that expertise is shared for the benefit of pupils, and joint ventures such as the art exhibition held in Windsor. Through the language college initiative, the school's foreign language assistants and sixth formers go into some local primary schools to help enhance the teaching of French, German or Spanish. Large numbers of primary school children come to enjoy a Fun Club after school in Italian. Local primary and secondary schools have frequent opportunities to extend their knowledge of languages and other cultures through attendance at the school's 'extravaganza days' such as the Latin Day, the Spanish Day, or the Chinese New Year event.
63. The school curriculum benefits significantly from its excellent partnership with the wider community, and in 2002 the school received a Curriculum Award for its work in this area. For example, pupils in Year 9 are involved in an industry week, which provides experience of marketing, design, packaging, advertising and sales. They also visit a local farm to gain understanding of the importance of agriculture, and undertake environmental art activities in local parks. All pupils in Year 10 take part in work experience, a week that acquaints them with the world of work, and how to work with others. In Year 10, they are also taken on visits to a church, a synagogue, a mosque, and a temple to gain important understanding of people's beliefs in a multi-cultural society. The annual Remembrance assembly for all pupils is a multi-faith service of worship. There is a well-attended careers conference for pupils in Year 11.
64. In return, the school makes effective contributions to the life of the local community. The school encourages pupils to support local and national charities, and last year a total of over £2,500 was donated to a range of charities. An annual party for the elderly is held in conjunction with Help the Aged, when pupils present their Christmas Show, and refreshments are served. Parents are encouraged to learn more about life in schools today through meetings organised through the Learning Zone. The school facilities are also made available for meetings of local organisations.

Sixth Form

65. The parents of students in the sixth form are extended the same information and involvement as those in the main school. They are invited to attend meetings prior to their children's entry to the sixth form and to discuss subjects and aspirations with the staff before and during their time in the sixth form.
66. Sixth form links with other schools and colleges are very effective, but not as extensive as in main school. There are no consortium arrangements, for instance, at the moment, but there are links to ensure that students entering Year 12 know about the range of opportunities available in each of the local schools and colleges.
67. The sixth form curriculum benefits significantly from the support of the local community. The Young Enterprise group is very active in school, and during the inspection students organised the sale of roses for Valentine's Day. Leaders of local faiths have developed a Philosophy Day for students in Year 12, and a sixth form conference involves speakers from the University of Oxford. There are also visits by representatives of the Royal Air Force to provide information about careers. Students in Year 12 are encouraged to visit Reading University to learn about university courses and procedures.

68. Students also contribute to the life of the community. For example, a number of students from the sixth form are involved in outreach work in local primary schools, taking part in music and language activities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are, overall, very good. The governance of the school, the effectiveness of management and the overall quality of leadership are very good. The headteacher's leadership is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent and inspirational leadership of the headteacher has enabled the school to develop very well, and to see potential problems as challenges to be overcome.
- This is an innovative school, and works in an excellent manner to improve education and social provision in the area.
- There is very good leadership in depth, seeking constant improvement. The school knows where it is going.
- The governors reflect the wide-ranging nature of the local community, and bring valuable skills to the school's work.
- The school is highly self-critical, and has very thorough systems to monitor the effectiveness of its work.

Commentary

Main school

69. *Governance* is very good. The governors reflect the social and cultural diversity of the area, and have a wide range of skills in their work for the school. Committees are used well to carry out governors' business, and considerable emphasis is placed on the induction and training of governors. The governors play an active part in mapping the strategic development of the school, taking an active part in the bidding for language college and Leading Edge status, for example.
70. Governors are also successful in holding the school to account. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, drawn from their own observations and meetings with staff, as well as from reports by senior managers. In almost all respects, they meet their statutory responsibilities. However, the requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met in full, and there are minor omissions from the annual governors' report to parents. The governors fully support the principle of collective worship in this highly inclusive school, but the substantial growth of the population, together with the very limited number of suitable spaces, make it impossible to organise a full daily programme. However, the high quality of what is offered has a strong positive impact upon the pupils' personal development.
71. The governors are insistent that this should be as inclusive a school as possible; in almost all respects, they have been highly successful. They have appropriate policies in place to promote inclusiveness, including matters of equality on grounds of race and disability, and take proper steps to monitor their effectiveness. However, without major structural changes, well beyond the scope of the school's funds, to give access to upper floors, disabled pupils, students, and adults do not have full access to the premises. This prevents them from gaining access to the library, for example. The school has funded other improvements, such as providing ramped access, wherever possible.
72. *Leadership* is very good overall. The headteacher's inspirational leadership has resulted in a school that has improved significantly since the previous inspection, and now offers an excellent curriculum and ethos. Innovation is one of its outstanding features, and is highly

influential beyond the school boundaries. A strength of the headteacher's style is that she delegates well. As a result, the whole of the senior team is dedicated to ensuring the highest possible standards and achievement in every area of the school's work. There is no complacency in this very good leadership group, and all staff and pupils have a firm belief in the power of education to transform the lives of the pupils and students.

73. The school improvement plan, criticised at the time of the previous inspection, has been improved. There is now better linkage between the whole school plans and subject plans, although the latter could, in some cases, focus still more sharply on outcomes rather than resource inputs. However, there is good integration between the various plans required for Leading Edge and language college status, which have the required clarity of view as to how pupils and students should benefit from the proposals.
74. The quality of the leadership of the school's specialist language college status is good. The head of the language college is enthusiastic and manages well. Progress with the language college targets over the first year of specialist status has been good overall. The headteacher and other staff have undertaken numerous visits to other countries to promote the school's partnerships, setting an example that demonstrates that the international dimension is important. Teachers at the school are encouraged, as part of their professional development, to work for short periods in other countries through teacher-exchange programmes. For example, currently the head of the mathematics faculty is preparing to undertake a three-month exchange to a school in China.
75. Middle managers generally lead their subject areas well. Leadership is very good in mathematics, ICT, geography, citizenship, and religious education. It is satisfactory in history, and good in all other subjects. The leadership and management of science are hampered at present by the lack of a head of science, co-ordinating the roles of the three heads of subject. The school is seeking to appoint a head of science for the start of the next academic year. The leadership and management of pupils and students with special educational needs are underpinned by the school's excellent commitment to inclusion. The school has a very clear vision of how to enable those who have learning difficulties, or have gifts and talents, to succeed. The close partnership of the deputy head and the special needs co-ordinator ensures that provision is very well planned, delivered, and reviewed. Very effective systems ensure that teachers are fully informed of the nature of pupils' needs. Good liaison with external specialist advisers and the well-targeted deployment of support staff, results in the close monitoring of pupils' progress. Provision has improved significantly since the last inspection.
76. *Management* is very good. Evaluation, and in particular regular self-evaluation, is embedded throughout the school, and there is a sharp focus on improvement. The high quality of the school's self analysis may be seen from the fact that its judgements on itself, prepared prior to the inspection, agree closely with the inspection findings. Throughout the school, there is a very strong commitment to inclusion, and to providing equality of opportunity for all pupils. The focus on individual achievement is evident, for example through the very detailed analysis of individual-level data, and there is a shared understanding among all staff that evaluation needs to be open and accurate in order to ensure that improvement is constant.
77. The school's finances are managed in a way that matches spending very well to educational priorities. There is a very good focus on the principles of best value, helped by the school's detailed educational and financial monitoring systems. The management of the recruitment, retention and workload of staff is excellent. Despite difficulties with recruitment, the school is fully staffed, and has maintained its high standards, thanks to innovative ways of recruiting and training teachers. Performance management arrangements are very good, staff targets linking well to those of the school as a whole. The professional development of staff is very good, with a strong emphasis on the effectiveness of provision within the classroom, ensuring that pupils benefit from a clear focus on learning as the core activity of the school.

Sixth form

78. *Governance* takes proper account of the needs of the sixth form. Governors have played a full part in the expansion and widening of sixth form provision, including the most recent developments of the curriculum to include the International Baccalaureate. Strategic planning, including that for premises, takes full account of the needs of the sixth form.
79. *Leadership* of the sixth form is very good overall; sixth form matters are represented fully within the senior team's work. Curriculum leadership in the sixth form is very good. The best subject leadership displays vision, commitment and a sense of purpose, with the achievement of individuals at the core of its work. The sixth form is led in a manner that reflects the school's specialist language college status. For example, the school's plans to introduce the International Baccalaureate is a sensible move, in that it should ensure in future that most students continue to study a language throughout their time in school, in line with the school's specialist status.
80. *Management* of the sixth form is very good, and draws upon the same excellent systems of monitoring and self-evaluation that are seen in the main school. The sixth form is well-staffed, usually with subject specialists, and teachers receive very good professional development. The arrangements for funding the sixth form are good. At present, the diversification of courses and curriculum pathways, ahead of more formal arrangements for partnerships with other schools, means that the main school subsidises the sixth form to some extent. This is reflected in the number of relatively small teaching groups in some subjects. The school is aware of this, and the planned developments under the Leading Edge programme, together with the different demands of the Baccalaureate programme, have the potential to make more efficient use of funds.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4141215
Total expenditure	4112447
Expenditure per pupil	3833

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	150127
Balance carried forward to the next	178895

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The 2003 GCSE results were in the top five per cent nationally.
- Current standards are well above average and achievement is good because expectations are high.
- Teaching and learning are good: much is very good, and lessons are very well planned.
- Marking is not playing a full part in telling the pupils what to do to improve.

Commentary

81. The pupils' entry standards are above average overall. In 2003 the results of Year 9 pupils in national tests were high, and in the top five per cent of schools nationally; nearly nine out of every ten pupils achieved at least the higher Level 6. Results had been climbing since the previous inspection: the boys' results peaked in 2001 and the girls' in 2002. Boys' results were lower in 2003 and the girls' results dropped, too, even more sharply, largely because of the school's response to changes in the test that year. However, girls still did better than the boys, although by a smaller margin than is seen nationally. The 2003 GCSE English and English literature results were both high in national terms. Girls' results, in particular, were significantly better than girls' results nationally.
82. In work seen, standards in both the current Year 9 and 11 are well above average. The standards of a significant minority are high, and there is no significant difference between the standards of boys and those of girls. The pupils' achievement is good at all stages. By the end of Year 9, most pupils consolidate the good levels with which they enter the school, and a significant number make even further improvement. Their speaking and listening skills are well above average, and they speak fluently and with a good vocabulary. The majority of pupils read expressively and accurately, retaining facts. Higher and average attaining pupils use the skills of inference and deduction very well, and the pupils explore the motives of characters in the plays and novels they read. Most pupils write with the expected levels of accuracy and organisation. Pupils in a Year 9 class worked on the dagger speech from *Macbeth* with interest, analysing the imagery that Shakespeare used and showing good understanding of the drama of the scene.
83. By the end of Year 11, most pupils have expanded their vocabulary and use sophisticated language, changing the register to suit different audiences. Their writing is organised and accurate, and they analyse passages of text in great detail, making links between the different parts of the writing, suggesting motives of the characters, and showing awareness of quite sophisticated language and imagery. Throughout the school, ICT is used effectively to develop the pupils' writing and reading skills. In a few cases, some of the pupils whose mother tongue is not English do not reach the highest grades because of inaccuracies in their use of subtlety within English. Examples included '*Both modern audiences and renaissance audiences can appeal to this*' or '*... almost on the contrary.*' The school is already aware of this, and has been drawing up plans to provide better support for these otherwise high attainers.
84. Teaching is good overall, with several very good, or even excellent, lessons. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to plan interesting lessons, and they ensure that time is used

well, with a good variety of different activities to sustain the pupils' interest. In the very good and excellent lessons, teachers make sure that the pupils have time to think, so that they give considered answers, and a dialogue develops, with teachers probing the pupils' ideas and asking for more extensive responses. Assessment is good overall: very good in some classes but, in others, the marking of the work of some pupils is not as helpful as it could be. Though pupils are told what they have done well, they are not always told what to do to improve. Some teachers use target sheets stuck into the front of the pupils' books to provide good details of the pupils' progress, but the department's policy on assessment is inconsistently applied.

85. Curriculum leadership is good with some very good features. The head of department, relatively new to the post, has a very good grasp of the department's strengths and weaknesses, and has formed a very good team of specialists. Many of the texts make good contributions to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly in preparing the pupils for life in a multicultural society.
86. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The well above average results have been maintained, there are now many more opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills, achievement is now at least good, rather than satisfactory, and ICT is used effectively.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

87. Pupils join the school with above average standards in speaking, reading, and writing in English. Good achievement is evident throughout Years 7 to 9 and the school provides plenty of opportunities for speaking, listening, reading, and writing in all subjects, so that standards are well above average by the end of Year 9, and these levels are maintained through Years 10 and 11. Inspectors judged the overall provision made for the development of literacy to be good across all subjects. Opportunities for the development of literacy are identified in schemes of work and lesson plans in most subjects: teachers capitalise on the good skills pupils have, and use them effectively to enhance and extend their learning.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good, enthusiastic teaching, characterised by high expectations and challenge, ensures that pupils are encouraged to achieve well in languages.
- Very good planning for the pupils' individual needs allows all pupils to progress well.
- Assessment is used well by the teachers to help the pupils improve the quality of their work.

Commentary

88. At GCSE, results in 2002 were above average in both French and German; not enough candidates took Spanish to allow statistically reliable national comparisons. Compared with the other subjects they took, boys tended to do better in German, although overall, the pupils did as well in modern foreign languages as they did in their other subjects. In 2003, French and German results were similar. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have shown a rising trend.
89. Standards in work seen during the inspection are above average by the end of year 9, which represents good achievement given the pupils' general standards on entry to the school. By the end of Year 9, the pupils understand and use the languages they learn with increasing confidence. They speak and write with a good degree of accuracy, and there are very good examples of more extended speaking and writing. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because they are well supported and appropriately challenged. By the end of Year

11, standards continue to be above average. The highest attainers, including gifted and talented pupils, reach standards which are well above average: they can write at length on a variety of topics, and are beginning to enjoy using more sophisticated language. They have a good grasp of grammar, and speak and write with some fluency. These standards represent good achievement overall throughout the main school. Pupils with special educational needs continue to be well supported, and achieve equally as well as the other pupils.

90. Teaching and learning in modern foreign languages are good throughout the main school. There is a significant proportion of very good teaching that is stimulating, enthusiastic and consistently challenging, promoting very effective learning. The teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and are highly competent in the languages they teach. Nearly all use the foreign language consistently, so that the pupils develop good understanding and good accents. They know their pupils well and plan very carefully for individual needs, ensuring that all pupils are appropriately challenged, so that they think hard, work hard, and make real progress in understanding, speaking and writing the language. The teachers set very high expectations of behaviour and concentration, to which the pupils respond well by working hard. Significant factors in their good progress are their sensible approach to study and their very good attitudes to learning languages. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between the pupils themselves, are excellent. Aspects of literacy are very well taught, and the pupils have frequent, regular opportunities to improve their ICT skills. The teachers use assessment well to monitor the pupils' progress and to set realistic targets to help them to improve.
91. Curriculum leadership is good, and has the potential to be of a very high order once management systems, recently put in place by the new head of faculty, have had their full impact. The faculty has made good progress since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good, responsible for the very good improvement since the last inspection.
- Test and examination standards are being maintained at very high levels.
- Teaching is very good, so that the pupils achieve very well.
- Computers are not used sufficiently well to support learning.

Commentary

92. Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were high, in the top five per cent of schools, and are rising faster than the national trend. Boys perform better than girls and the gap between them has been widening. Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003 were also high in comparison with all schools. Performance is better in mathematics than in other subjects in the school.
93. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are high. This represents very good achievement when compared to the pupils' well above average level of attainment on entry to the school; the pupils' understanding of mathematics, already strong, is deepened and broadened. High attainers use basic knowledge accurately in the solution of problems, in trigonometry and arithmetic for example. They draw neat, accurate graphs in statistics. Lower attaining pupils draw neat, accurate pie charts, but do not relate their area to the number of observations that they represent.
94. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are high. The achievement of pupils is very good as high standards are being maintained and extended. For example, high attaining pupils complete their GCSE course in Year 10 and develop further mathematical skills in pure mathematics in Year 11. Other students on the higher-level course can simplify algebraic fractions, for example,

and solve difficult equations well. The statistical coursework shows above average standards of literacy and ICT, and a well above average knowledge of statistics. Word processing enhances the quality of the presentation of this work, but the lack of use of computers more generally restricts the rate of progress through it. Overall, computers are not used sufficiently well in learning.

95. Teaching and learning are very good. There is a small element of satisfactory teaching, but none of the teaching is unsatisfactory. The strength of the teaching lies in the very good subject expertise of the teachers. It is stimulating, enthusiastic and consistently challenging, stemming from a very good knowledge of how pupils learn. Explanations are precise, accurate and with a very good emphasis on the elegant way to solve equations, for example. The outcome is very good learning, helped by the good use of resources and the excellent use of questions. Pupils are required to make extended oral contributions in class to demonstrate what they know, which is very good practice. They listen very well. In lessons that are satisfactory overall, the teaching does not meet pupils' needs as well as in other lessons, in Year 7, for example.
96. Leadership and management are very good. The very good use of assessment across the department is powering the continual drive for a rise in standards. The excellent vision in the leadership sees further scope for a greater rate of learning by the younger pupils. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, as standards, already strong, have improved and pupils' achievement has improved significantly.

Mathematics across the curriculum

97. Overall standards of numeracy are well above average. Mathematics is no barrier to learning in other subjects. Geography and science use these standards very effectively in their teaching. Pupils use lines of best fit very well and clearly understand the concept. The standard form for working with very large and very small numbers is handled very well by most pupils. Mathematics is integral to the geography department's work. In design and technology in Year 7, pupils use a computer-controlled router to make precise shapes. Pupils can read a Vernier calliper on a depth gauge accurately to 1mm. They make good use of their skills in weighing and measuring and develop spatial awareness through their three dimensional work. Opportunities to use mathematics in the teaching are not as well developed in English, history and music, but use is satisfactory.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is good; teachers are receptive to new ideas.
- Pupils take pride in their work.
- There is a lack of co-ordination across the faculty, resulting in inconsistencies in practice.
- There is a shortage of equipment, which sometimes restricts learning and pupils' enjoyment of science.

Commentary

98. Pupils enter the school with standards that are above average. Standards in tests in Year 9 in 2003 were high, in the top five per cent nationally, as they have been in the last four years. This represents good achievement. Boys' overall results are normally better than those of the girls. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, results from all science subjects were high by national standards. They were better in biology, chemistry, and dual certificate science than in physics. Based on their standards when in Year 9, these results represent satisfactory achievement for

the pupils concerned. Compared with the results that pupils obtained in non-science subjects, they tended to do better in biology, but less well in physics. They were comparable in chemistry and dual certificate science. There were few A* grades, but the number of A grades is improving.

99. In work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average throughout Years 7 to 11. Pupils' attitudes are very positive, and they develop good habits in the presentation of their work. Their achievements are therefore good in all year groups. Even when teaching is routine rather than inspiring, they make the best of their opportunities. They readily ask questions to consolidate their understanding. In Year 9, pupils study forces and their impact on speed. There was a very positive attitude to learning by both girls and boys as they discussed issues such as the affect of balanced forces on the speed of an object, and why a coin falls faster than a feather. In a Year 11 chemistry lesson about the manufacture of fertilisers, pupils responded well to the teacher's questions. They also sought advice when needing clarification. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and also make good progress.
100. Teaching is good overall and at each stage of the school. It is more effective in biology and chemistry than in physics, where there is insufficient guidance for non-specialist teachers. Teachers' planning of the content of lessons is good, but in a significant minority of lessons they do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to use their initiative, other than in practical work. Where opportunities are provided, pupils willingly volunteer to contribute to the lesson. There is good liaison with technicians, so that lessons start promptly and with purpose. Time is used to the full, and normally includes a good summary to reinforce learning objectives. Homework is set regularly to consolidate learning, but does not always provide sufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils.
101. There is good use of key words to develop literacy skills, and pupils are confident when using formulae for calculations. Most teachers use computers effectively in planning and in lessons, but the use of sensors by pupils to collect data is under-developed. The assessment of pupils' work lacks consistency across the science faculty, for instance in the quality of comments about how to improve. The science laboratories are of good size, but most of them require modernisation to enable learning opportunities to be maximised. There are insufficient resources; the inferior quality of equipment such as microscopes and timers has a negative impact on learning.
102. Overall curriculum leadership within the science faculty is good; it is very good in biology and chemistry, and satisfactory in physics. Good teamwork exists, with regular meetings to discuss curriculum issues and organisation. However, the present management structure is complex, and results in too much fragmentation within the faculty. For instance, there is no overall day to day co-ordination within the subject by a head of faculty, or a coherent development plan to combine the priorities of the different subjects. The result is inconsistency in the implementation of policies, and of some aspects of priorities such as the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Furthermore, all pupils do not receive the same access to the use of ICT. There is also insufficient time devoted to lesson observations in order to discuss and improve teaching skills.
103. The science faculty has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved in Years 7 to 9. Standards in dual award science have improved, but pupils' standards are similar overall in Years 10 and 11. Pupils continue to have a very good attitude to work. There are still no clear arrangements for the sharing of good practice, and many of the problems identified within the accommodation still exist. Moreover, the quality of resources has declined, although there are better opportunities for teachers to use computers.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Years 10 and 11.
- The pupils' achievement is good at all levels.
- There is an above average number of computers and the school makes very good use of its network links to provide resources.
- The school employs ICT very effectively to enhance learning across the curriculum, but misses opportunities in some areas.

Commentary

104. Standards in the short course GCSE taken by all pupils in Year 10 were well above the national average for pupils normally one year older, although there were no A* grades. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection, when standards were judged to be average.
105. Pupils begin the school with average knowledge and skill in the use of ICT and reach above average standards by the end of Year 9, so achievement is good. They are extremely proficient in the use of a range of office and communications software, but the teachers' assessments fail to take into account the relative weaknesses in the areas of control programming, measuring and data logging. Pupils also have limited experience in the design and use of databases. Boys and girls reach similar standards. By the end of Year 9, all pupils are halfway through a full GCSE course and in Year 10 standards are well above average with nearly all pupils having a good understanding of simple systems analysis and able to produce a range of documents merged with spreadsheet data. Achievement is good. In Year 11 standards are maintained through the use of ICT in other subjects. For example, GCSE pupils make very good use of the Internet and a range of software in presenting research in geography and religious education.
106. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers have high expectations and continually revise their programmes of study as pupils' understanding increases. Teachers are not afraid to introduce new software and hardware, and share the learning process. Pupils are keen to learn, and are very patient with the inevitable teething troubles. The best lessons are well-paced and challenging, and allow pupils to report verbally on their progress and share ideas with each other. Lessons are less successful when this review of achievement is missing, or when the teacher has not planned work for more talented pupils. However, learning is always maintained by the enthusiasm of the pupils and the very well prepared on-line resources. The assessment of pupils' work is thorough, particularly for the GCSE, and pupils have a good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
107. The leadership of ICT is very good. The ICT co-ordinator for Years 7 to 9 is also responsible for the GCSE examination, and works well with a deputy head teacher to plan and direct the curriculum. This is done as part of a continuous whole-school review and development process. Representatives from senior management and subject departments are also part of a curriculum committee that reviews and promotes the use of ICT throughout the school. There is a shared vision and commitment to develop and get the best from ICT.
108. The purchase and installation of equipment and software is overseen and very well managed by a systems manager, technicians, and outside contractors. This enables the school to make use of five suites of computers, computer rooms in several departments and trolleys of laptop computers that can be set up in most of the classrooms throughout the school, through radio links. All teachers have their own laptop computers and these are increasingly used with data projectors to provide a very powerful tool.
109. Provision has improved well since the previous inspection. Standards have risen. The school has increased the range and extent of the computer network and ensured teachers are trained to use it. The use of ICT across the curriculum is now good; in modern languages it plays an important part in links with foreign countries as well as access to a wealth of teaching material.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

110. Competence in ICT is good throughout the school. By the end of Year 9, pupils use a range of software packages to design posters, produce multimedia presentations and research the Internet in most subjects of the curriculum. They continue to employ these tools into Year 11. All pupils take the GCSE ICT examination in Year 10, where they learn to produce a simple accounting package for a small business. They use the advanced features of a spreadsheet to calculate piece-rate bonuses. A higher than average number of pupils can compare different versions of software, for example graphics programs, and say which is best for a particular task. Whilst pupils only have limited opportunities to write control programs or to measure and log physical events using a computer, some exciting work is being done in design and technology. Year 7 pupils use computer aided manufacturing processes in pewter casting, and GCSE pupils use computers in textile design.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision for geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils consistently reach well above average standards.
- Learning is enriched by the very good teaching and a very well managed curriculum.
- Marking is thorough and assessment data are used very well to track pupils' progress.
- Very good leadership and management result in consistently high standards.

Commentary

111. The GCSE results have been well above average over the last three years. The significant improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades of A* and A at GCSE in 2003 shows that standards are continuing to improve.

112. Standards at entry are broadly average. Very good achievement is seen in Years 7 to 9, with pupils reaching well above average standards for the end of Year 9. Pupils have very good geographical knowledge, understanding and skills. They learn very rapidly. Already, Year 7 pupils have developed very good geographical skills as shown in their accuracy in graph work plotting influences on population changes. Achievement remains very good for those pupils who opt to continue the subject to GCSE; they reach well above average standards for the end of Year 11. Their knowledge and understanding is often very mature and used well to debate issues such the cause and effect of global warming, and factors influencing tourism. Written work, including GCSE coursework, is of high quality, reflecting a very good grasp of geographical processes and patterns such as the water cycle and coastal erosion. It also shows very good standards in literacy skills, for instance in the use of a wide range of specialist terms, and very good application of numeracy in measurement and the analysis of data. Course work is very well researched with extensive and well judged use of the Internet. Clear maps, diagrams and photographs are used well to illustrate evidence. All pupils, boys and girls, the gifted and talented, and those with special educational needs, achieve very well in comparison with their earlier attainments.

113. Teaching is very good. The rapid progress made by Year 7 pupils shows that this has an immediate impact. Highly skilled planning ensures a very clear focus, challenge and a good range of learning opportunities. Clear authoritative presentations, enhanced by the good use of ICT, draw on very good subject knowledge. The strong emphasis on the development of geographical skills and very high expectations result in pupils working at full stretch. For

example, a brisk and highly structured question and answer session challenged Year 11 pupils to be very accurate in their evaluation and explanation of the cause and effect of global warming. Questioning is used very skilfully in many lessons to probe and extend pupils' understanding. There are some occasions, however, where this is not the case. Similarly, while group work is usually a strength enabling pupils to explore issues in depth, in a few lessons it is not sufficiently well supported by guidance by the teacher. Pupils' research skills are strongly supported by very good guidance for access to Internet websites. Pupils are very well prepared for GCSE examinations.

114. Progress is closely monitored and tracked through systematic assessment from the time pupils enter the school. Work is marked regularly. In Years 10 and 11 marking provides good guidance for improvement but in Years 7 to 9, it tends to be less helpful in clearly identifying aspects for improvement.
115. Leadership of the subject is very good. The head of department gives a very clear direction for teaching and learning. She and the other geography teachers are deeply committed to the achievement of excellence. Very good curriculum management results in exceptionally broad learning opportunities enriched by very good quality field work. Provision is kept under constant review. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection in improving standards and the quality of teaching and learning.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By the ends of Years 9 and 11, standards in history are well above average.
- Pupils achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Teaching styles do not always allow enough opportunities for pupils to develop oral confidence and skills.

Commentary

116. The GCSE examination results have been high in all recent years prior to 2003. In the last year they were still far above average, with boys performing better than girls. Pupils' performance in history was similar to that in their other subjects.
117. Standards in history on entry to the school are broadly average. Consequently, the well above average standards of work seen by the end of Year 9 represent very good achievement for most pupils. In Year 11 the pupils who have opted for history were seen to be working at standards well above average. As a result of the evident drive to revise and hone skills during the final months of the course, they are likely to attain the very high standards usual before 2003. Achievement here is also very good, particularly for boys, who outnumber girls on the course by around two to one. In all years no significant variations in performance were seen between any groups. Achievement reflects the effective partnership between pupils and teachers, as pupils are very well motivated to succeed. In Year 9, pupils demonstrated understanding of a range of complex causes for the Second World War, and wrote essays discussing which were most significant with a good command of relevant and accurate detail. Literacy skills are very high, so pupils write fluently using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. In Year 11, pupils were also writing to good effect in their coursework task on the impact of President Roosevelt's 'New Deal' on the USA, and showed a mature understanding that is very good for their age. Pupils have appropriate ICT skills for research and presentation purposes. This is an area of some improvement, but the use of ICT could be developed still further. Pupils use their numerical skills to evaluate statistical evidence. They become very skilled at interpreting a range of historical sources, and perceiving differing interpretations.

118. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is very good. All lessons seen were at least good and most were very good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to advantage. The best lessons have a clear historical focus, offer very good challenge to all and use time very well. Homework was given at an early stage rather than in a rush at the lesson end, and pupils were clear on its purpose. Marking and assessment are thorough and helpful so that students know where they are and how to improve. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to discuss and debate so that oral skills and confidence develop in line with writing skills.
119. Currently, there is no head of department, but the teacher temporarily in charge of routine management is providing satisfactory short-term leadership and management in collaboration with the head of faculty. High standards are being maintained, but the momentum for continued improvement and future development needs the vision of someone appointed with that responsibility. The curriculum reflects the school's cultural diversity and specialist language status well, but is too weighted to world wars and Germany in Years 9 and 10. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- The subject has made significant progress since the previous inspection.
- The quality of curriculum leadership is very good because it provides a clearly focused drive to push up standards.
- All pupils are motivated to learn by enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers.
- The amount of time allocated to the subject for those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not opt for the GCSE is well below recommendations.

Commentary

120. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were high. Pupils tend to gain similar grades to those in the other subjects that they take.
121. When pupils enter the school, standards are broadly average. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 9, representing very good achievement for all groups of pupils. By the end of Year 9, pupils know and understand the main beliefs and practices of the major world religions. They have a very good understanding of what these beliefs mean to people of faith. They understand moral complexities and show high levels of tolerance and respect for those around them. By the end of Year 11, standards in the GCSE option group are high and all groups of pupils show very good achievement, making very good gains in their knowledge and understanding, building well on the work they have done previously. It was not possible to observe any lessons for those pupils who have not opted for the GCSE course, but other evidence seen suggests that their standards are above average and that they achieve well given the well below average time allocated to their religious education. Standards in literacy are well above average throughout the age range and pupils show confidence in making use of ICT.
122. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection when all teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 was judged to be unsatisfactory or poor. A major strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers make very good use of pupils' diverse cultural and faith backgrounds. This means that the subject is firmly rooted in pupils' own personal experiences as well as in a wider context of understanding and valuing the diversity of faiths represented in Britain. As a result, pupils take the subject seriously and clearly value their lessons. The subject is over-subscribed at GCSE. Teaching is enthusiastic,

knowledgeable and well-planned. Intellectual demands are high, and pupils rise to the challenges set for them. Clear exposition, coupled with judicious questioning and prompting makes pupils think beyond the obvious. Although pupils work very hard and show very high levels of enthusiasm, a small number occasionally chatters quietly or writes when they are supposed to be listening; such behaviour is not always challenged by the teacher.

123. Curriculum leadership is very good. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly in the quality of teaching. There is a clarity of vision and a shared commitment to improve. Morale is high and all teachers show commitment and purpose. The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.

TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' GCSE results are above average at the end of Year 11 in food, textiles and graphics.
- The teaching is high quality and teachers are very committed to raising standards.
- The curriculum is effective in raising standards, and it is consistently applied across the subject.
- Boys' standards at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 are too low.

Commentary

124. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations in 2003 was well above average in food, textiles and graphics, and was above average in resistant materials. It was above national averages overall, but boys' results were well below girls' results. GCSE results have been consistently higher than average over a number of years, but there was a significant dip in the number of A* to C grades in resistant materials in 2003.
125. Pupils enter the school with generally below average standards in design and technology. They achieve well and at the mid-point in Year 7, many pupils are reaching standards that are in line with, or above, average. By the end of Year 9, standards in the work seen during the inspection are above average overall. This represents good achievement; girls outperform boys. In Year 9 food lessons, the pupils successfully use a variety of research methods to individually plan recipes. They prepare and cook the ingredients and produce high quality meals. In resistant materials lessons Year 9 pupils are able to use a computer-assisted router to manufacture standardised parts for a mechanisms project. By the end of Year 11, standards in work seen are above average overall. They are above, and sometimes well above, average in food, textiles and graphics, and are average in resistant materials. This reflects good achievement throughout Years 10 and 11 for the pupils concerned. For example, Year 11 pupils in textiles lessons demonstrate very good achievement when designing and making books for children with visual impairment. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT development is good in design and technology. Pupils use technical vocabulary well, accurately weigh ingredients in food technology, and use measurement effectively in resistant materials lessons. ICT is used well to support pupils' learning.
126. The quality of teaching is good overall, but is better in food and textiles than resistant materials and graphics where the teaching team is relatively new, following a period of staffing difficulties. High calibre teaching is characterised by very good subject expertise, a brisk pace in lessons, clear explanations of task, effective marking and constructive feedback to pupils, and a good and developing range of teaching strategies. However, teachers do not always make the learning objectives clear, which results in pupils being unsure about what they are being asked to do. In a small number of lessons, teachers are unable to ensure the attention of some pupils, mainly boys, when explaining important information. Occasionally, pupils are asked to

undertake design tasks without knowing enough about materials and techniques, which results in limited achievement.

127. The quality of leadership across all aspects of the faculty is good overall and is improving. The head of faculty has good vision and is developing a consistent approach across all areas. A recent faculty review has been highly effective in terms of monitoring teaching and learning and identifying areas for improvement.

128. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Accommodation issues have been addressed, pupils' work is now accurately made and appropriately finished, and computer assisted design and manufacturing work has been effectively developed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The focus subjects were art and design and music. Drama was also sampled. The GCSE drama results in 2003 were below average: pupils tended not to do as well in drama as in their other subjects. Standards were average in the two lessons observed. Progress was satisfactory during the lessons, and both teaching and learning were satisfactory.

Art and design

The provision for art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils reach well above average standards.
- Teaching is very good overall.
- The curriculum is stimulating and pupils enjoy learning.
- One teaching room is very small and restricts achievement for some groups.
- Some of the most talented pupils do not always achieve as highly as expected.

Commentary

129. In the GCSE examination, standards were well above average, following a consistent pattern since the previous inspection. In general, pupils do as well in the art examination as they do in the other subjects that they take. In 2003, all pupils gained a grade C or above, although there was a smaller proportion of the A* grade than seen nationally. Boys generally reached similar standards to girls.

130. Pupils enter the school with average knowledge and skill in art, and by the end of Year 9 reach standards of work seen that are well above average, making achievement very good. Pupils develop a good understanding of how they can incorporate the ideas and imagery from art of other times and cultures, thanks to the very thorough teaching and stimulating range of research opportunities provided. Their knowledge of visual language is also well developed: for instance, of colour, shape and texture. The school tends to over-estimate the number of pupils reaching the very highest levels. As a result, teachers do not give the pupils opportunities at this stage to develop a more individual response to research and experiment, along with more sophisticated critical and analytical skills. On the GCSE course, the pupils' work is of a well above average standard overall for the end of Year 11. Achievement is good for those pupils taking the course, but teachers sometimes allow the most able pupils to fall into too comfortable ways of thinking and working, so that their work is often not distinctive enough to attain the highest grade.

131. Teaching is very good overall; it is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The teaching challenges and stimulates the pupils both intellectually and creatively. The teachers' own knowledge of art and design is very good. They expose pupils to a wide range of

experiences and stimuli which broaden their understanding and appreciation as well as developing their skills. In all Year groups pupils learn to work independently, often using their own experiences as a starting point. Because of the cultural diversity within the school this results in work showing an eclectic mix of religion, popular culture, fine art and detailed drawing. The teachers assess the pupils' work thoroughly and give them a clear idea of their success and areas for improvement. Pupils know what National Curriculum level they should achieve and are keen to do their best. A high grade at GCSE is also a key objective for the older pupils and their sketch books demonstrate their dedication. Much was made of a recent visit to the Tate Modern, with intelligent drawings and lots of detailed writing.

132. Curriculum leadership is good. The leader for art and design has developed strong teamwork and built well on the input provided by an Advanced Skills Teacher in the department. With the help of the senior management team the leader evaluates and improves the provision and makes effective plans for the future. These are also based on thorough analysis of performance data and regular, careful observation. She has noted the effect that the limited accommodation has on the pupils' achievement. A good example was a lesson observed during the inspection. Pupils in Year 8, drawing from life, had insufficient room to move and observe their own and others' work properly. As a result, they had great difficulty in getting the correct proportions.

133. Art and design has improved well since the previous inspection; standards have risen due to developments in teaching and resources. The weird and wonderful 3-dimensional work is an engaging feature, and ICT is beginning to have an impact on the way that pupils work.

Music

The provision for music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average and pupils achieve well because of good teaching.
- Boys in particular benefit from single sex teaching.
- Music makes an excellent contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Commentary

134. Standards in music on entry to the school are broadly average, although there is a wide range of attainment, and pupils have had a variety of experiences in music prior to coming to the school. The number of pupils taking GCSE music in 2003 was too small to compare with national statistics.

135. In work seen, standards by the end of Year 9 are above average, representing good achievement. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Composition skills have also improved. The pupils who take music in Years 10 and 11 are too small in number to make meaningful comparisons with the national average, but they achieve well in relation to their starting points. A significant minority of the pupils struggle to remember terminology, for example, relating to Indian music.

136. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are specialists, and have good practical skills, which they call on when they have to illustrate a point. The spontaneity that is a feature of much of the work is the result of good modelling by the teachers. Lessons are well planned, with plenty of challenge in both practical and theory work. In a minority of lessons, teachers work too hard to provide pupils with the information they need, instead of making them think, particularly in Year 11 lessons where pupils can become passive, waiting for the teacher to do much of the work. In other lessons, however, the pupils respond particularly well and enjoy

performing their sequences to the rest of the class, as they did when creating compositions based on serialism in Year 9.

137. The pupils' concentration is not always fully developed as they move through the school, and some of the time slots allowed for working on tasks on the keyboard are too long. However, the pupils learn to be constructively critical, led by their teacher, who is encouraging, relating the level they are working at to National Curriculum criteria, and telling them what they have to do next in order to move up to the next level.
138. Curriculum leadership is good. The head of department has a very clear vision of how the subject should develop, and improvement since the previous inspection has been good. ICT is used very well in music. Standards of literacy are above average, and a very good variety of techniques, including work with individual whiteboards, quick fire 'warm-ups' and frequent checks on the understanding of terminology ensure that the pupils' musical vocabulary is constantly developing. Opportunities to develop mathematics through music are satisfactorily taken. Music makes an excellent contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and particularly cultural development, where a wide range of cultures is explored through their music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers' good grasp of examination requirements promotes well above average results.
- In core lessons, pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject develop well.
- Standards and achievement could be better in some aspects of National Curriculum practical work.

Commentary

139. Standards in the GCSE examinations were high in 2002. The small size of entry in 2003 means reliable statistical comparisons are not possible, but figures indicate well above average standards, a dip caused because only a small percentage gained the highest grades. The recent trend shows that girls in the school outperform boys.
140. When pupils enter the school, standards are average. In work seen, standards are average overall in games and gymnastics by the end of Year 9, representing satisfactory achievement. The pupils' knowledge and understanding surpass their levels of performance. By the end of Year 11, standards in core lessons are average overall. Pupils lead group warm-up exercises confidently; they can organise tournaments and umpire. Whilst achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, improvements to the range and quality of pupils' performance are modest because curriculum organisation places insufficient emphasis on extending and refining practical skills at this level. Standards in examination classes are above average in Year 10, and well above by the end of Year 11, representing good achievement for both boys and girls in theory and practical aspects. Pupils use computers competently for research; their oral work is good. High attainers display their knowledge competently in written work. Standards in sport are good in district competitions. A few individuals compete at county and national level.
141. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. The rapport between teachers and pupils underpins very good behaviour and high participation rates. In the most effective lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge and methodical planning ensures all abilities engage in purposeful, progressive tasks. In Years 7 to 9, learning is good when teachers' explanations, demonstrations and pertinent questions help pupils to extend their

knowledge and improve performance. In less successful lessons, teaching methods are not as efficient as they might be in promoting sustained activity for the whole class or clarifying what individuals need to do to become more skilful. In Years 10 and 11, pupils enjoy taking responsibility for aspects of their own learning in core lessons. However, they receive limited instruction on developing and applying practical skills. In GCSE lessons, teaching and learning are usually good. Regular marking and assessment ensures that pupils are very well prepared for final examinations.

142. Curriculum leadership is good. Management is satisfactory, given the constraints of staff recruitment and retention. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards have risen following the introduction of the GCSE course. The school gained Sportsmark in 2002. However, timetabling anomalies persist and accommodation remains unsatisfactory; this limits achievement.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The citizenship curriculum has been very carefully planned to meet the needs of the pupils.
- Teaching is very good. As a result, pupils achieve well and show good levels of understanding of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society.
- Citizenship lessons are having a very positive impact on pupils' personal development.

Commentary

143. Pupils reach above average standards by the end of Year 9 and well above average standards by the end of Year 11. All groups of pupils achieve well, given that citizenship is a recent addition to the National Curriculum.
144. Pupils understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. They show this in their discussions with one another and with their teachers. Pupils are able to justify their opinions about social issues orally and in writing, and they use their knowledge and skills effectively to debate both local and world issues. For example, pupils in Year 9 took part in a formal debate on whether the wearing of religious symbols should be banned in state schools. This took place on the same day that the French parliament debated the issue.
145. Teaching is very good overall, and has succeeded in establishing a firm base for this new subject. Lessons motivate and engage all pupils in the class, so that learning is also very good. Teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed to the subject and pupils respond very positively. Pupils are actively encouraged to develop informed opinions and to challenge the opinions of others. During the week of the inspection, for example, pupils in a Year 11 English lesson with a citizenship focus held group discussions on the concept of a 'just war'. Such lessons provide very good opportunities for pupils to develop enquiry skills and to express and listen to a variety of different opinions.
146. Curriculum leadership is very good. Citizenship has been introduced in a very effective manner. The curriculum is very well planned with distinct modules in PSHE, all National Curriculum subjects and religious education. All subjects have been audited to ensure that statutory requirements are met. Good procedures are in place to assess and record pupils' achievements and to monitor the delivery of citizenship across the school. There is a very clear commitment to ensuring that the subject is not taught within a vacuum but has a clear impact on pupils' personal development.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. Only courses with five or more candidates entered are shown here.

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	96	33	49	73.3	85.1
Biology	23	100	92	22	36	74.8	74.1
Business studies	32	97	96	28	33	79.4	76.5
Chemistry	24	100	99	42	46	85.8	81.1
Classical studies	7	100	99	43	52	85.7	88.0
Drama	6	100	98	17	42	76.7	82.9
Economics	8	75	96	13	46	57.5	83.1
English literature	33	100	99	52	44	90.9	84.3
Design and technology	7	100	95	71	36	100.0	76.5
Geography	12	92	97	25	41	68.3	81
History	10	100	97	60	41	94.0	81.2
Information technology	18	89	89	11	22	55.6	64.1
Mathematics	31	77	93	23	52	58.7	84.7
Other social studies	50	88	94	32	39	65.2	77.7
Physics	18	94	93	33	43	67.8	78.6
General studies	5	100	90	20	29	68.0	69.3
Business VCE	57	86	87	2	17	48.8	60.1
Information technology VCE	55	98	84	28	25	80.4	64
Travel and tourism VCE	22	96	88	0	16	50.9	61.4

Level 3 GCE AS courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	6	100	82	50	33	41.7	33
Business studies	5	80	89	60	32	42.0	35.4
Chemistry	9	44	85	11	37	16.7	35.2
English literature	9	100	94	67	38	50.0	38.9
General studies	6	50	79	0	26	16.7	30.0
History	7	86	92	29	37	35.7	37.8
Mathematics	24	25	74	8	34	9.6	31.3
Other social studies	18	56	83	22	33	21.7	33.6
Physics	6	33	82	17	36	11.7	34.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus subjects were English and French.

English

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good curriculum leadership has settled the department well after a difficult year so that the teaching team can approach new developments with confidence.
- Good teaching ensures that students learn well. Their achievement is good in relation to prior attainment.
- More could still be done to avoid 'over-teaching', to involve students in their work and to encourage independent learning.

Commentary

147. Examination results in 2002 were above average. They were about average according to provisional results for 2003. Staffing difficulties affected these most recent results, but analysis shows that students nevertheless achieved as well as should be expected.
148. Standards in work seen are average by the end of Year 13. Given that students in this year group had a very disrupted start to their course and below average prior attainment on starting the course, they have achieved well to reach current standards. This is so because of the effective provision in terms of background material, guidance on tackling assignments and substantial writing practice. Most students are conscientiously thorough in their writing, attend well to their teachers' guidance, and all use a word processor capably. The reticence of some students in question and answer or discussion sessions is a legacy of earlier staffing uncertainties – confidence is growing as a result of the more settled environment established by the current leadership. In the one lesson seen, Year 12 students were achieving well overall and standards are average at this stage of their AS course. Analysis of Year 12 students' written work showed that some minority ethnic students do not yet have sufficiently full control

of vocabulary or expression to reach the higher grades. They would benefit from their attention being drawn to awkward usage and from more examples or models of effective writing.

149. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They convey this with commitment and use an interesting variety of methods and materials, including on two occasions the very effective use of an electronic whiteboard. As a result students attend closely and learn well. It is noticeable, however, that teachers often work harder than students, and a well-intentioned attempt to ensure that students learned what they needed to know led on one occasion to an over-directed lesson with over-reliance on the responses of a few students. As a result the pace of the lesson was unvaried and learning passive. The best teaching involves all students actively and ensures that they take responsibility for their share of the learning. In a very good Year 13 lesson the teacher's lively and challenging questioning ensured that all contributed with some confidence; she also summarised contributions very effectively so that key points were clearly established and appropriate literary vocabulary used. The involvement of the students and the teacher's enthusiasm lifted the mood of the lesson and ensured that purposeful and productive analysis took place.
150. Curriculum leadership is good, with clear direction for development in September 2004 when the International Baccalaureate will be introduced for some students. The relatively recently appointed head of department has worked hard and successfully to provide a more consistent and settled experience for students. She is a good role model for the teaching team. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because the positive features of that report have been maintained and standards are higher.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which is a key factor in the progress the students make at this level in their French and their knowledge of France.
- The students are well monitored and well supported, often by individualised help in the initial stages of the course, and consequently they achieve well.

Commentary

151. The numbers of students who take the A-level examination in French each year are not large enough to allow reliable comparisons with national standards. However, in 2002, and in 2003, all the students passed the A-level examination, each obtaining results in line with expectations based on their GCSE performance; their achievement was satisfactory.
152. Students from the school make the transition from GCSE to A-level very effectively. Students who enter the sixth form from other schools often find A-level work very demanding at first, and are appreciative of the very good support they receive from the teachers which allows them to achieve well in the initial stages. Standards in work seen during the inspection are above average. This represents good achievement, given the pupils' average standards overall on entry to the sixth form. The Year 13 students speak in French easily, competently and spontaneously, although they still make errors. They discuss effectively, making valid points, and have sufficient French to defend a point of view. They tackle increasingly challenging material with growing confidence, and their listening and reading skills are good. They have mastered basic grammar well, and have a varied and interesting range of vocabulary and idiom with which to express themselves in speaking and writing. The highest attainers write with some precision, style, and occasional very good use of sophisticated idiom. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers.

153. Teaching and learning are good overall; some teaching is excellent. Lessons are very well planned, and the teachers' excellent subject knowledge and high expectations are key factors in promoting good learning and achievement. The teachers give the students challenging work to do, but support them well through a range of effective teaching methods, ensuring that they have the linguistic tools to speak and write with growing confidence. In lessons, the teachers give time to students to express their own ideas and opinions, and encourage and engage them well. Work set for private study and homework is interesting, and allows the students to develop well as independent learners. Aspects of literacy are well taught so the students develop a growing understanding of language. Application of number is not frequently fostered, but students have sufficient understanding to be able to cope confidently in French with numerical calculations associated, for example, with statistics involved in the topics they study. The students have good access to computers to enable them to improve their linguistic skills as well as their ICT skills. Strengths noted at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained. Assessment has improved since then and is now very good: the teachers know the students very well, monitor their performance, and give them individual support to enable them to maintain continuous, good improvement.
154. The leadership and management of French at this level are very good. The curriculum is very well planned and good use is made of topical French material to provide an up-to-date knowledge of France. Students have benefited from study visits to mainland Europe that the department organises regularly. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

The inspection focused on the AS and A-level mathematics courses.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department benefits from very good leadership, leading to the very good improvement seen since the last inspection.
- Standards have risen sharply since 2002, and are now above the national average.
- As a result of very good teaching, students are achieving very well.
- Computers are not used sufficiently well in the teaching of mathematics.

Commentary

155. Standards in GCE A-level were above average in 2003, a significant improvement on the well below average levels of 2002. This improvement followed the appointment of a new head of department and other initiatives within the school, resulting in a fresh, whole-team approach to the teaching. Standards at AS in 2003 were well below average as a significant number were without the necessary level of algebraic skill at the start of the course.
156. Standards in work seen in Year 13 are above average. Achievement is very good when compared to the below average standards at the start of the course. In pure mathematics, students recognise the need for double angle formulae in calculus and apply them well in the solution of problems. They can differentiate a variety of functions very well and are currently developing the inverse processes. In statistics students know their basic definitions and are coming to terms with their use in problems involving tests of significance. Levels of communication and ICT skills are above average.
157. The students in Year 12 are already achieving well. Students in mechanics know their formulae and can 'look at' a series of problems and determine their nature. They know how to represent forces in equations, for example. In statistics, formulae are well known and students produce well disciplined graph work. In pure mathematics, students are able to explain their solutions of trigonometrical equations very well, lacking only the use of computers to enhance their learning

further by visual means. They can apply tests for factors and use economical methods in the solution of problems.

158. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching is consistently good or better, and occasionally excellent. It is stimulating, enthusiastic and consistently challenging, stemming from a very good knowledge of how students learn. The strength of the teaching lies in the subject expertise of the teachers, their expectation of students' learning and the response of the students, who engage very well in their studies. Learning is consolidated very well through whole class discussions in which students propose solutions to problems and explain them in detail. This enables the teachers to emphasise basic mathematical principles very well. Excellent learning opportunities in preparation for formal examinations flow from these discussions, for example the way in which marks are allocated. The quality of the teaching enables students to use their initiative and encourages independent study. Questions are used very effectively.
159. Leadership and management are very good. The choice of modules and the inclusion of further mathematics in the curriculum match the needs of the students very well. Further curriculum proposals serve to demonstrate the excellent vision in the leadership. Improvement since the last inspection is very good because standards have improved significantly. Year 12 entry standards have been improved.

SCIENCE

The focus subject was chemistry, but work in biology and physics was also sampled.

Standards in biology are above average and improving. In a good biology lesson, Year 13 students worked individually to investigate the effect of acidity on the digestion of protein by enzymes. They worked confidently, and clearly enjoyed the challenge.

Standards in physics are below average. A Year 13 lesson about the strength of the earth's magnetic field was observed. Students measured the strength of this field by pulling a wire through the lines of force and measuring the voltage produced. Although they eventually obtained worthwhile results, they were very dependent on their teacher to help with the practical details.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall leadership of the subject is very good; the course is very well organised.
- The teachers make very good use of computers to enhance learning.
- The quality of students' coursework is very high.
- There are very good relationships between students and their teachers.
- There is insufficient monitoring of students' folders of work.

Commentary

160. Students with a wide range of prior attainment are permitted to begin the course in Year 12. A significant number has taken GCSE examinations in other schools. All students quickly adjust to the increased demand of AS and A-level work. Overall, results at examination are well above average. The proportion of students gaining A and B grades has increased dramatically in each of the last two years. Based on their performance in the GCSE examination, students' achievements are very good. Female students have performed better than male students in each of the last two years. There are no consistent differences in the achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

161. Overall take-up for chemistry is high, with an average of around 40 students each year. There is a good balance of male and female students. A high proportion of students completes the two-year course. They clearly enjoy the subject, and show determination when faced with difficulties. The quality of work seen remains well above average; achievement is very good in relation to the students' average prior GCSE attainments. All students know their target grades; these suggest that the high proportion of A and B grades is set to continue. In a Year 12 lesson about polymers, students learned to use the general formula for polymers, building successfully on work covered in the GCSE course. By Year 13, they confidently discussed absorption spectra; this work was very effectively linked to food constituents and healthy eating.
162. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, The planning of lesson content, and strategies for learning, are very good. A minority of lessons is too dominated by the teacher, with insufficient opportunities for students to use their initiative, but good questioning techniques maintain their interest. Relationships with students are very good, and students develop a very positive attitude to learning. There is a good contribution to the development of students' communication skills, and their application of number. For instance, they are encouraged to pronounce the names of organic chemicals, and the quality of their more extended writing in coursework is high. They use graphs particularly well to analyse results. Computers are used less frequently by students, but teachers effectively employ laptops in planning and teaching. Tests are marked thoroughly, but routine notes in folders need more careful monitoring. There are insufficient references to AS and A level grades when commenting on standards of work.
163. Curriculum leadership and management of the subject are very good. The course is well planned, so there is excellent progression in the work; this assists students' learning. There are regular meetings, and very good support for teachers new to the school. This is particularly important because of the high turnover of teachers. There has been good progress in chemistry since the last inspection, particularly in the standards of work of female students. The monitoring of teaching has increased, but there is still insufficient time devoted to discussing teaching skills. The use of examination data, and value added measures, is now much more thorough, and contributes to the identification of strategies for further improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The AVCE single and double award ICT course was the focus of the inspection. The A-level in computing was also sampled, and two lessons were observed. The two lessons covered similar aspects of the curriculum but were different in character. In the good lesson, the teacher set a good pace and enabled students to develop HTML code at their own level through very effective online resources. In the satisfactory lesson the teacher went through the process of writing BASIC code on the board, with pupils taking notes, so that all had to work at the pace of the slowest student. Learning in both lessons was helped by the good attitudes and enthusiasm of the students. In the examination in 2002, standards were below average. In the 2003 examination results were similarly disappointing: the school's data showed that lower-attaining students in particular did not achieve as well as predicted.

Vocational ICT

The provision for AVCE information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and the use made of online resources.

Commentary

164. Standards in the 2002 double-award examination were average overall. In 2003 standards were also average.
165. The standards in Year 13 are now average after disappointing results in the AS tests. Students enter the course with a wide range of capabilities, as indicated by their performance in the GCSE or GNVQ examinations, and from a range of backgrounds. Overall, standards are below average at entry, including communication skills. Achievement is good; students are enthusiastic and last year only one out of 28 students left before completing the course. Students learn to analyse 'real world' ICT applications and provide solutions using a range of software and hardware. Male and female students do equally well.
166. Teaching is good overall and enables most students to learn well. Teachers have very good, up to date, knowledge of the subject and prepare very helpful coursework resources which pupils can access during lessons and at home. They also make good use of data-projectors and multimedia software for demonstrations, although the interactive possibilities have yet to be explored. Teachers use very good assessment and target-setting to provide individual support for students. However, teachers sometimes make insufficient allowance in lesson planning for the different ability and background of some students. This is particularly critical in the Year 12 classes where students need more help with planning their own learning as well as with their communications skills. In one lesson it was clear that students had not understood the objectives, which limited their achievement. In all lessons learning is very much enhanced by the interest and enthusiasm of the students and their willingness to work hard.
167. The leadership of the subject is good. The co-ordinator for AVCE is knowledgeable and committed and the subject attracts a good number of students. The students themselves have a wide range of ambitions, including the computer industry, but also the medical professions and finance. They are well informed and full of praise for the school. The ICT department is well-managed and senior management support for the evaluation and development of the teaching is strong. Good use is made of assessment and examinations data to improve the programmes of study. Technical support is very good and provides some sophisticated tools including e-mail and web-site design.
168. Improvement since the last inspection has been good: achievement has improved, as has the access to resources

HUMANITIES

The focus subject was psychology, but history, sociology, religious education, and politics courses were sampled.

Religious education is a new course; last summer saw the first results in the AS course. Standards were above average, representing good achievement for most of the students. Three lessons were seen where teaching and learning were good overall. In some lessons students benefit from very skilled team teaching.

Government and politics is a well-established course where students at A-level have performed well consistently in recent years; standards have been above average. Standards in the AS are average and achievement satisfactory. Two lessons were seen. Teaching and learning were very good in both lessons. Students benefit from lively teaching and very good expertise. They also benefit from the very good opportunities for enrichment activities such as visits.

One lesson was sampled in history. Standards were well above average and all students were achieving very well owing to knowledgeable and challenging teaching.

One geography lesson was seen. A-level results are below average. They have improved over the last two years and continuing improvement is evident in the work seen during the inspection. Students were achieving well in the lesson seen as a result of good teaching.

One lesson was sampled in sociology. Standards were above average and all students were making clear gains in their understanding because of knowledgeable and patient teaching.

Psychology

The provision for psychology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average but reflect satisfactory achievement from students' modest GCSE results.
- Students participate well in lessons, but many do not work hard enough otherwise.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, but structures to guide students' learning need to be more rigorous.
- Good leadership and management are strongly committed to raising standards.

Commentary

169. The 2002 A-level results were below average and 2003 results were similar. Numbers taking the subject in Year 12 have increased in recent years but a high proportion does not continue to the full A-level course. Many students chose psychology as a fourth subject to enrich their learning in Year 12, but many drop the subject because they find it very difficult.
170. Current standards of work seen in both Years 12 and 13 are below average. Students have sound knowledge and understanding of psychological theories and concepts. Year 12 students for example, confidently identified the causes of stress, and another group made clear presentations on their findings about memory. Year 13 students had a good grasp of the influences on personality making good links with their own experiences. When questioned however, many students show weaknesses in their depth of knowledge, and ability to think more widely than their immediate brief. Written work varies in quality. The best essays are well structured and make good reference to psychological studies and research as evidence to support points made. Many, however, are not sufficiently clearly focused, argued and concluded. Much written work lacks detail, especially in providing explanation and in evaluating the reliability of research. Much writing is descriptive and insufficiently analytical. Achievement is satisfactory when compared with their below average standards at GCSE. There is no significant difference in achievement of male and female students. The achievement of many Year 12 students is hindered by their poor motivation, which results in much home and course work not being completed, in spite of good teaching.
171. The students' communication skills are good overall. Writing is generally accurate in terms of spelling and punctuation. Students read fluently and listen well, but sometimes lack confidence in speaking. Numeracy skills are applied well in the interpretation and presentation of data. Students make good use of ICT for presenting course work but there is less evidence of its use for research.
172. Teaching is consistently good. The teachers' very good subject knowledge results in very clear explanations and a strong emphasis on psychological research theories and studies. This was particularly evident in the Year 13 lesson in influences on personality. Very good classroom relationships create a very positive learning atmosphere. Well-guided group work is effective in providing opportunities for students to explore issues in depth and to learn from each other especially when required to present their findings to the whole class. Questioning regularly tests knowledge, but checking of understanding and reinforcement of learning is not always

sufficiently rigorous. Clear structures to consistently guide and support learning are not fully developed. Revision is well supported and students are well informed of external examination requirements. Progress is assessed regularly and results are used well to track progress, but marking does not provide sufficiently specific guidance for improvement.

173. The acting head of department provides good curriculum leadership and management. She and the other teacher of psychology are deeply committed to improving standards. Schemes of work have been revised to ensure that the curriculum is interesting and meets syllabus specifications. Provision is kept under close review. The subject is well placed for further improvement. Line management arrangements are effective, but need to ensure that students are well informed about the intellectual demands of the subject before taking it up. Psychology was not inspected at the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus subject was design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The examination results are significantly above national averages and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good and enables students to learn effectively and acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills.
- Students are enthusiastic about their work and talk confidently about it.
- Some group sizes are very small.

Commentary

174. In 2002 the pass rate in design and technology at A-level was significantly above average. The proportion of students who attained high grades was also significantly above average. The students did significantly better in design technology than in the other subjects that they had taken. In 2003 the pass rate was again 100 per cent, with high grades in food technology, but lower grades in product design.
175. Standards at entry are average. Standards of work seen in lessons are above average overall, and thus pupils achieve well. Students in food technology successfully use a software package to draw a net for the packaging aspects of a food item they have designed and produced. A group of students in a product design lesson on bearings understand the function of a bearing and the need for lubrication between two bearing surfaces. Throughout Years 12 and 13 students' design work is high quality and meticulously presented. Students have developed a good range of writing styles and use subject specific vocabulary accurately and with understanding. ICT is used effectively across all subjects for research and presentation purposes. The use of number and mathematical principles are embedded well into schemes of work in all subjects
176. The quality of teaching is good overall. Lessons are well planned and teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects. They target probing questions effectively in order to involve all students, and in turn the students gain confidence in explaining their judgements. Teachers have high expectations and constantly challenge the students to improve the quality of their outcomes.
177. The students talk confidently and enthusiastically about their work; learning is enhanced by their positive attitudes. They understand what they need to do to reach the highest levels. They have

very good relationships with their teachers, feel well supported and are confident of their success.

178. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Courses are well planned and the work that the pupils undertake is motivating and challenging. Assessment systems are clear and used effectively. However, although group sizes are reasonable in food technology they are small in textiles and particularly so in Year 12 product design. Overall the subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus subject was art. Music was also sampled. In relation to prior GCSE performance, the achievement of the small number of candidates was good. In a lesson that involved students from Year 12 and Year 13, good teaching and skilful organisation meant that both year groups achieved well in analysing scores. The students used their practical skills to support their learning and showed high levels of independence in their work.

Art

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning ensure that current students achieve well.
- The range of unusual media, including installations and ICT, which students use to express their individual ideas, is good.
- Accommodation is severely restricted and prevents students accessing their work outside lessons.

Commentary

179. The A-level results in 2002 and 2003 were below average. This represented a decline from the time of the previous report. Students did not achieve well, in some cases because of poor attitudes and despite sanctions. The 2003 AS results were stronger. Numbers are usually small, but retention rates are good.

180. Standards at entry are average overall. Standards in the current Year 13 are above average; students achieve well. Again, numbers are relatively small and one student has to study outside usual lesson times because of timetabling problems. Year 12 is a very small group whose standards are not yet showing the achievement that their higher grades at GCSE suggest they can make. In lessons, Year 12 make satisfactory progress, but students are taking an unusually long time to settle to the expectations of sixth form work. Almost all post-16 work shows strong individual responses to given stimuli. Students work in an interesting range of media, often towards unusual installation-art related ideas. ICT plays a strong role in many visual explorations. Sketchbooks and work journals show good, creative investigations and students demonstrate strong understanding of a good range of artists' work. A larger than average proportion of students has come from other schools, often as non-native speakers, sometimes from difficult backgrounds abroad. These students do as well as their peers, often expressing challenging personal ideas through their artwork very effectively. Achievement has been good for the current Year 13.

181. Teaching and learning are good. The range of teaching methods matches students' needs well. One-to-one facilitation is an effective, key method of working. Staff give effective, individually oriented feedback to students about work, with a good level of dialogue to challenge them towards their next developments. Formal presentations by teachers, for example to stimulate their thinking about different ways of approaching their work, are wide-ranging and good, with the effect that students use the rich range of styles and media described. Relationships are

good and most students readily rise to teachers' expectations that they will visit galleries and other sources of ideas independently. They also use visits organised by the department effectively in their work. Assessment is good, being geared to each student's particular needs and the directions of their projects.

182. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Standards have risen and the scope of students' expressive responses has increased. The department faces difficulties caused by barely satisfactory accommodation for sixth form needs. Single periods hinder the depth students can achieve in lessons. Students also lack access to their work outside scheduled lessons because rooms are used for other subjects. The department manages these difficulties well and minimises adverse effects on students' work. In the absence of key skills provision at school level, the department needs to ensure that the application of number and the communication aspects are securely planned into schemes of work. ICT is well used as a creative tool. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was travel and tourism, but two lessons in physical education were observed: an A-level sports science lesson in Year 13 and recreational sport in Year 12. Standards overall are average and most students achieve satisfactorily in relation to prior attainment. In the A-level lesson, teaching on how to improve written synoptic answers was good; the single student present gained in confidence because of the teacher's clear explanation of the mark scheme and encouraging approach. Year 12 students appreciate the physical recreation provision and relate well to their teachers in games and aerobics.

Travel and tourism

Provision in travel and tourism is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and the vocational context.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Attitudes to learning are positive and teachers promote independent learning skills. As a result, students achieve well.
- Assessment is very well developed, and assessment information is used well to promote learning.
- The use of ICT in the subject could be further developed.

Commentary

183. Results in the AVCE in travel and tourism have been below average, but in line with expectations based on students' below average standards at entry; achievement for these students was satisfactory.

184. Standards of work seen are now above average because standards on entry are average and the quality of teaching is good; achievement is good. Students become confident learners who show an understanding of the main concepts and skills and understand the evidence requirements of both internally and externally assessed units. Because they are well motivated and well taught, students, including the large number with low levels of initial prior attainment, achieve well. Students achieve particularly well in the more practical aspects of the course, requiring independent learning and research skills. For example students' achievement was very good in some recent assignment work, which required them to investigate two contrasting types of visitor attraction.

185. Many students have a limited prior experience of the context of the travel and tourism industry, and acquire a greater contextual knowledge as a result of the course, although this could be extended further. Students can apply their communication and numeracy skills satisfactorily in context, although the quality of oral communication is often better than that of written communication.
186. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and learning activities closely linked to the assessment requirements of each of the AVCE units. This contributes to effective learning and a good level of achievement. Teachers are very well aware of the assessment criteria, assess work accurately and use assessment information to promote learning. Teachers use a variety of learning activities and draw on their own theoretical and contextual knowledge in their teaching. In the best lessons, pace is very brisk, students are provided with a high level of challenge and students are involved in their own learning. Resources are used well to promote learning. Library resources are up to date and developing, but very limited in number. Students make satisfactory progress in the use of ICT in their work, but their progress in using ICT to support learning in this subject is sometimes hampered by lack of regular access to ICT facilities.
187. Management of travel and tourism has recently changed as a result of temporary staffing changes. However, leadership and management are good and the team is effective and works well together. Staff are effectively deployed and students on the course are gaining a coherent learning experience. There was no report on the subject in the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

The focus subjects were A-level economics and AVCE business. One lesson of AS business studies was also seen. Achievement was good, as was teaching. However, there were only limited opportunities for the highest attainers to fly even higher; the cramped room limited the learning approaches very greatly.

Economics

Provision in economics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide a high level of challenge.
- Higher attaining students achieve very well.
- Attitudes to learning are positive and teaching is good.
- Students acquire a very good knowledge of the key concepts and terminology of the subject.
- The achievement of lower attaining students is only satisfactory and could be further improved.
- The use of ICT could be further developed to promote learning in the subject.

Commentary

188. Results at AS and A-level are above average, and more students are now continuing with the subject from Year 12 into Year 13. Although there is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls, a higher proportion of boys than girls opts for the subject.
189. Standards at entry are average. Standards of work seen are above average and students achieve well. Students are confident learners and understand the specialist terminology of the subject and the main concepts, although some struggle with applying these concepts in real world contexts. Students handle numerical and graphical information well and their communication skills are satisfactory.

190. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide a high level of challenge. As a result, higher attaining students achieve very well. However, the achievement of lower attaining students is only satisfactory and could be further improved by the use of more individual teaching and more structured tasks. Lessons are well planned and assessment is very well used to plan for learning. Questioning skills are good and teachers use students' responses to assess their understanding and advance learning, developing their knowledge and understanding and skills of analysis and evaluation. Pace is often brisk. Teachers use resources well, and the effective use of PowerPoint to support whole class exposition is now widespread. The planned use of ICT by students could be further developed to promote learning in the subject. Reference materials in the school library are of good quality but insufficient in quantity.
191. The head of faculty provides very good curriculum leadership and management. She has a very clear vision and a strong sense of direction. She understands clearly strengths and weaknesses of economics in the school through very effective monitoring and has developed appropriate plans for improvement, linked to the school development plan. The subject was not reported upon at the previous inspection.

Business Studies AVCE

Provision for business studies AVCE is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students on the double award now achieve well; those on the single award do not.
- Provision leads to very good personal development for many students, particularly for those doing the double award.
- The Young Enterprise scheme adds significantly to students' understanding of business practice.
- Good teaching and very good assessment systems lead to significant improvements in standards because students respond well to the guidance given.
- Students with difficulties in written communication need more direct teaching of this key skill than the department itself can provide.
- Accommodation scattered across the site means that the department can not create a Business Studies or Vocational-related learning environment.

Commentary

192. After the curriculum change from GNVQ Advanced, when standards were above average, results have fallen significantly. In both recent years, attainment was below average. In 2002, girls' results were significantly worse than boys'. Students on the single award achieved significantly less well than those doing the double award. Achievement on the double award course have been in line with students' predictions. Those on the single award are often well below expectations.
193. Most students taking both courses have been, and still are, new entrants to the school's sixth form. Many are lower attaining students who need to resit GCSE examinations in core subjects. Girls have often been passive learners in their previous schools, who find the more active styles of vocational learning very difficult. Students' predicted grades are mostly D/E/Us and they are stretched significantly by the need to meet the very high standards of the VCE requirements early in Year 12. Despite this, retention rates are good.
194. Standards in current courses reflect recent examination results and are below average overall, but in relation to the students' often modest prior attainments, achievement is good. Those doing the 12-unit course in both years, although still gaining below average standards, often achieve particularly well. Students on the six-unit option, mostly those who are also doing a 12-

unit ICT course, have less positive attitudes towards their business studies and consequently achieve less well than they might. Standards are below average by Year 13, but there is much very good learning across time, particularly as students mature. The course contributes significantly towards their personal development. The very good combination of Young Enterprise with the VCE course is a strong feature of this development. Year 13 students on the double award achieved considerable gains in learning across the week of inspection, when one of their major promotional events occurred. Weaker areas relate to students' difficulties in the analysis and evaluation aspects of the course requirements, which are weak and prevent most achieving the higher grades. Combined with lower motivation, for example from students on the single award, students do not learn soon enough how to develop these skills. The lack of Key Skills lessons at school level exacerbates these difficulties, because the department by itself can not raise students' standards in these areas far enough in the time available. The department is also hindered in enabling better achievement because it lacks a base, either for the subject, or for vocational learning. This means that teachers can not provide a work-related ethos where higher standards can be more effectively promoted.

195. Teaching and learning are good overall. Variability in the department is related to the degree of staff experience and qualifications. Some teaching is very good, with assessment being a very strong element in enabling students to achieve well. Staff have good relationships with students and use a good range of teaching styles. Students achieve best where learning is active and they experience aspects of business practice "for real". The Young Enterprise event for the double award students, for example, showed very good engagement and high levels of motivation from two competitor "companies" selling roses for Valentine's Day. These students' assignments show a very good degree of diligence in trying to meet teachers' advice and guidance about how to improve their work to meet the next grade criteria. Students use ICT well in producing their work. They collaborate well, helping others confidently when necessary.
196. Leadership is very good. These courses are very well managed within an extremely diverse faculty. Effective monitoring means that the department manager knows the shortcomings well, for example of the single course groups. A clear plan to improve standards is now a priority. The department is popular and expanding, but has no base, so the subject ethos is difficult to create. The subject was not inspected in 1998.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

