

INSPECTION REPORT

INVICTA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Maidstone

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118792

Headteacher: Mrs S Glanville

Lead inspector: John Godwood

Dates of inspection: 10 – 14 November 2003

Inspection number: 259138

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 – 19
Gender of students:	Female, with some males in the sixth form
Number on roll:	1270
School address:	Huntsman Lane Maidstone
Postcode:	ME14 5DR
Telephone number:	01622 755856
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Taylor
Date of previous inspection:	January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Invicta Grammar School became a specialist business and enterprise college in September 2003. It received the DfES schools achievement award in 2000, 2001 and 2002. It has the Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark awards. Other awards include Investors in People, Excellence in Careers, the International School Award and Enterprise Pathfinder Status. It is a selective school: to be admitted, students must be in the top 25 per cent of those taking Kent Local Education Authority's selection test. Attainment on entry is very high in comparison with all schools but is broader than in some grammar schools. The school is popular and is over-subscribed; the number of students has grown by a third over the last six years. The socio-economic context is relatively favoured, though students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Most students are White British; one in twenty are from minority ethnic groups, including some from Asian backgrounds and a very few Black students. There are no students who speak English as an additional language. Twenty-two students have special educational needs, which is well below average, and of these three have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The most common needs are emotional and behavioural difficulties, with a very small number who have sensory impairment or autism.

Most sixth form students continue on from the main school, but approximately one in five transfer from other high schools or grammar schools. This includes a small number of boys. The entry requirement is six higher grades at GCSE and, in most cases, at least a grade B in the subjects being studied. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18242	John Godwood	Lead inspector	
13336	Ian Adams	Lay inspector	
9756	Ken Parsons	Lay inspector	
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education
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2082	Mick Connell	Team inspector	Theatre studies
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Business education
1524	Susan Farnfield	Team inspector	Science
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
11508	Chris Griffin	Team inspector	English
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
8139	Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music
30114	Ann Kenward	Team inspector	Citizenship, geography
18886	Frank Ruggiero	Team inspector	Mathematics
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Invicta Grammar School is a very good school. It provides very good value for money. Students attain very high standards at all stages and achieve very well. The school has an excellent ethos which provides strong support for achievement and personal development. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership and management are very good in motivating students and staff to reach high standards and in planning continual improvements. Through its external links the school encourages a strong awareness of life within the community and around the world.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students are happy in the school. They achieve very high standards and their personal development is excellent.
- Leadership provides very clear aims and continuous striving for excellence.
- There is much very good and excellent teaching, though departmental monitoring is not used enough to ensure that all teaching is of a consistently high quality.
- Students have very good opportunities from an innovative curriculum and many activities.
- Governors provide very good support, particularly in strategic and financial planning.
- There are good assessment procedures, but their use in different subjects is inconsistent.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen at all stages and at GCSE and A level the improvement has been faster than the national trend. Teaching has improved, with a significant increase in the proportion of very good and excellent teaching. There has been a good response to the issues in the last report. Well-led developments in assessment and monitoring of teaching have raised standards. Religious education teaching is very much improved. There has been limited progress in providing sufficient accommodation for all students to take design and technology. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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 students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Students' achievement is very good in all stages. They reach very high standards (in the top five per cent of schools nationally) at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13. GCSE results in 2003 were broadly average for similar schools, but standards were higher in previous recent years and in work seen. Current standards are very high in most subjects. They are lower, though above average, in design and technology, art, music, physical education and citizenship because in these subjects, students' attainment on entry is average. Achievement is particularly high in English because much of the teaching is inspirational. It is very good in most subjects. It is less high, though still good, in mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education and citizenship. This variation is related to variations in the quality of teaching. The small number of students with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as other students. In the sixth form, the very high standards are partly due to the fact that students take more subjects than is the case in most schools. Standards within most subjects are well above average. Boys achieve as well as girls in the sixth form.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent. Their attitudes and behaviour are excellent and make a significant contribution to their achievement. They are happy in the school and committed to its values of achievement, opportunity and concern for others. Attendance is excellent and punctuality very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Teaching is very good in all year groups. It is very good in many subjects, but good in mathematics, science, ICT, physical education and citizenship. Teachers have very good subject expertise and give clear explanations. Teaching often is interesting and challenges students to think for themselves and work independently. Students' response is excellent and they work together very well. In many subjects, computers are used very well to enhance teaching and learning. There is some variation in the quality of teaching: much is very good and a significant amount is excellent but in some lessons it is uninspiring and students learn passively. Students' work is assessed regularly, but subjects vary in how well they track progress and give students constructive advice on how to improve.

The curriculum is very good, with continuous improvements made to raise standards and develop independent learning. Students have very good opportunities to enrich their learning from a wide range of trips and activities, including links with schools and communities in other countries. Links with business are being extended through the recently-acquired business and enterprise status. The school is well equipped with modern technology; the accommodation is restricted but is very well maintained. Care is good; students are very well supported and views are taken seriously.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership in establishing clear values and planning strategically for continuous improvement. Leadership and management by other key staff are very good, with a high level of teamwork. Through excellent financial management, regular improvements to the buildings and facilities underpin curriculum developments and reinforce the school's ethos. Monitoring and evaluation are systematic but the outcomes are not used regularly enough to raise all teaching to a consistently high standard. Governors give very good support and challenge in monitoring and planning. Two statutory requirements are not met. Collective worship is not held every day for all students because of a lack of space, but through other opportunities their spiritual development is supported very well. Despite the school's best efforts, it lacks the accommodation for all students to study design and technology in Years 10 and 11; this ceases to be a requirement in September 2004.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents and students are very pleased with the school. Parents believe that children achieve well and like the many additional opportunities. Some believe there is too much homework but others consider it appropriate. A few find parents' evenings too rushed and a very few believe there is too much emphasis on examinations. Students like the chance to achieve but also find the school friendly and relaxed. They feel trusted and appreciate the extra-curricular activities. They find many lessons interesting. They think it is progressive and focuses on people as well as achievement.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- use monitoring and evaluation procedures more regularly and consistently to ensure that all teaching is challenging and interesting;
- ensure that all departments make full use of assessment procedures to track students' progress and inform them of what they need to do to reach their targets.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT INVICTA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

Invicta Grammar School has a very good sixth form which is very cost-effective. Standards are well above average in many subjects and students' average total points score is in the top five per cent of schools nationally. A-level results have improved very significantly since the last inspection. Students achieve very well through very good teaching and guidance.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve very high standards.
- They receive very good support and guidance.
- There is much very good and excellent teaching, with a high level of independent learning.
- In a minority of lessons, teaching is dull.
- There are very good relationships between students and with teachers.
- The timetable does not include a programme of recreational sport.

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	<p>Very good in English. Students are motivated by high quality specialist teaching.</p> <p>Very good in French. Teaching is very good and there are extensive enrichment activities that deepen students' experience of the language.</p>
Mathematics	Good in mathematics . Students are very well guided and supported. The best teaching is very good, but some teaching is not challenging enough.
Science	Good in chemistry . Teachers are specialists and teaching is good. Students need more opportunities to work independently.
Information and communication technology	Very good in ICT . Students are highly motivated and work very independently. They need more guidance on how to reach their targets.
Humanities	<p>Very good in history. Most of the teaching is very challenging and students are very motivated. In a few lessons, teaching is less inspiring.</p> <p>Very good in religious education. Teaching is inspiring and students are very well supported to work independently.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Very good in design and technology . Much work is set in a real context and through very good teaching students learn to work independently.
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Good in art. Teaching is good and students achieve well. Lessons are too short and there are not enough computer facilities.</p> <p>Very good in theatre studies. Students are highly committed and teaching is imaginative. There is much enrichment, including visits and productions.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in physical education . Teaching is good and students receive good guidance. There is no programme of recreational sport for all students.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Business	Very good in business education . Students are encouraged to work independently through very good teaching and many business links.
Health and social care	Satisfactory in health and social care . The scientific parts of the course are taught well, but students have insufficient work experience in Year 13.

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

Advice, support and guidance are very good. Induction into the sixth form is very good and students who join from other schools settle in quickly. Students receive very good feedback on their work. Their progress is monitored carefully in relation to their targets and action is taken to counter any underachievement. They receive very good preparation for later stages of education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are very good. The aims of the sixth form are central to those of the whole school and are focused on raising standards and improving students' opportunities and personal development. The sixth form is managed very well on a day-to-day basis. There is good communication between staff and with students to ensure that their progress and well-being are monitored appropriately. Finances are managed very well and, as a result, the sixth form is cost-effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth form students are very satisfied and would not wish to study anywhere else. What they most like is the ethos. They find it friendly – both among students and with teachers – but oriented to working hard. They like the facilities and the progressive approach. They like the fact that they are given freedoms and treated with respect. Their main concerns are that the common room is too small and Year 12 students would like the freedom to go home during study periods.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Students' achievement is very good throughout the school. Standards are very high at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13. Standards are higher in English than in mathematics or science.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have risen faster than the national trend.
- The A-level total points score has risen from average in the last inspection to the top five per cent of schools nationally.
- Very good achievement is supported by high quality teaching and students' excellent attitudes.
- Standards are particularly high in English and students' literacy supports their other subjects.

Commentary

1. Year 9 results in 2003 were very high compared with the national average and similar to those of other selective schools. Results have been consistently very high in recent years. They have improved in line with the national trend and the most recent results were, overall, the best yet achieved. English results were well above those of other selective schools. In mathematics and science, results were broadly similar to other selective schools but fewer students gained the very highest levels. This is partly because the school's entry requirement is broader than in some selective schools and its intake includes few students who gain the very highest scores on standardised tests of cognitive ability. In relation to their attainment on entry, students' progress was well above average.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	43.1 (41.9)	33.3 (33.3)
mathematics	44.4 (44.7)	35.3 (34.7)
science	41.6 (40.3)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 182 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results have in recent years been consistently very high in relation to the national average. In 2001 and 2002 they were above those of other selective schools. Results declined slightly in 2003 and were broadly average for similar schools, though they remained slightly above them. The decline was because a small number of students had personal problems and took fewer GCSEs. The GCSE average point score improved rapidly between 1998 and 2002 and the trend of improvement is faster than the national trend. In comparison with other Kent grammar schools, students' progress from Year 9 to GCSE in 2002 was above average in every subject.

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	98 (100)	53 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	89 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	95 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	52.9 (54.0)	34.7 (34.6)

There were 178 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ

3. For current students, standards at the end of Year 9 are very high. In relation to their attainment on entry, students achieve very well. This is due to high quality teaching, students' excellent attitudes and the school's ethos, which values individuals and encourages them to achieve and develop as whole persons. There is some variation in achievement across subjects. Students achieve very well in English, because the teaching is often inspired. The quality of teaching and students' achievement is not so high in mathematics and science, though it is good. Students achieve very well due to the quality of teaching in modern languages, history, geography and religious education. Achievement in citizenship is good. In subjects that require more practical skills, attainment on entry is closer to the national average. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average in art and ICT and above average in music, design and technology and physical education. Students' achievement is very good in art, music and physical education and good in ICT and design and technology.
4. Standards at the end of Year 11 are very high and students achieve very well. Achievement is very good in most subjects, but is good in mathematics, science, ICT and citizenship. In physical education, most students achieve well and those who study the GCSE course achieve very well. There are several factors that support students' achievement. Teaching is very good in many subjects and students bring a high level of commitment and interest to their studies. They have very good literacy and numeracy skills, which they apply well. Most students are very capable of working independently in doing research or using ICT. The school's many enrichment activities also contribute to standards in subjects such as modern languages, mathematics and citizenship.
5. Students with special educational needs make very good progress in reaching their individual targets, and in improving their reading and spelling ages. They achieve very well in National Curriculum tests and in external examinations. The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as other students. Gifted and talented students achieve very well because they are given additional challenges. In some subjects, including English, mathematics and religious education, standards reached by higher-attaining students are being raised by studying AS-level courses in Years 10 and 11.
6. The school sets challenging targets for GCSE results. These include targets for the number of A* and A grades as well as the average point score. It met its targets in 2002. In 2003, it exceeded the targets for A* and A grades but because a small number of students took fewer GCSEs, it did not meet the expected average point score.

Sixth form

7. Students' average total points score in A-level examinations has in recent years been very high compared with the national average and in 2002 was higher than in other selective schools. This is partly because students take more subjects than is typical. The average points score per subject in 2002 was higher than in other selective schools, though it declined a little in 2003. A-level results have improved significantly since the last inspection, when they were average. The sixth form includes a small number of boys. Their results are also well above average, though not quite so high as those of the girls.

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	100.0	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	50.3	39.4
Average point score per student	388.8 (341.5)	263.3

There were 121 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

8. Standards at the end of Year 13 are above average or higher in most subjects and sixth form students achieve very well. There are several factors that support this. Much of the teaching is very good, with very good subject knowledge and a high level of care for students' individual needs. Students receive very good support and guidance through good feedback and careful monitoring of their progress towards their targets. Students themselves have excellent attitudes to work: they enjoy sixth form life but are focused on their academic goals, cooperate well with their teachers and are capable of learning independently. Students' achievement is supported well by their very good key skills, including literacy, numeracy and use of ICT.
9. Approximately one student in ten is male, having joined the school after taking their GCSEs elsewhere. They appreciate the sixth form's ethos and the high quality teaching and achieve very well. Students from ethnic minorities achieve as well as other students.
10. Of the subjects inspected in detail, standards are well above average in English literature, French, ICT, history, religious education, theatre studies and design and technology and very high in business education. Students achieve very well in these subjects. Standards are above average and students achieve well in mathematics and physical education. Standards in chemistry and art were both affected by staffing difficulties last year; these difficulties are now resolved and in both subjects students are achieving well and reaching above average standards. Health and social care is a new vocational course: standards are above average and students' achievement is satisfactory.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Attendance is excellent in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Students' personal development is excellent – moral and social development are excellent; spiritual and cultural development are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are proud of their school and enjoy attending.
- Their attitudes make a significant contribution to their high standards of achievement.
- Students are confident and relate maturely and sensitively to other students and adults.
- They are very well equipped to face the demands of further education or work.
- The school encourages students to look beyond school and engage with exciting opportunities in the UK and throughout the world.

Commentary

11. Most students arrive in Year 7 with positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. The school builds on these foundations very well and encourages them to rise to new challenges. Students are interested in all that the school offers and want to do well. They are confident to take on new work and are keen to participate in lessons. They appreciate the wide range of other activities. Year 9 students who had visited World War I sites in Belgium, for example, had clearly thought deeply about the issues. Students are very willing to take responsibility. Year 7 students have all been issued with tablet PCs to use in their work and older students have had an important role in supporting them in using these. Opportunities for younger students to take responsibility are somewhat limited, however. Students are encouraged to empathise with others. In one class, for example, they experienced what the world looks like to the visually impaired by wearing restricting lenses.
12. Students concentrate well and lessons are very orderly. This applies even in the minority of lessons where teaching is not very stimulating. When moving round the school and during breaks they are very sensible and mature. There is very little bullying and very few exclusions. Relationships are very good. Most adults provide very good role models and students report that the friendliness is an important reason that they enjoy coming to school. The behaviour policy includes rewards and sanctions and provides teachers and students with useful

guidance. Although sanctions are not often needed, there is a gap in current provision for a sanction for 'middle rank' offences. The school has recognised this gap and has plans to remedy it.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1063	3	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	9	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	8	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	5	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	39	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	134	0	0

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

13. One of the school's aims is to help students 'develop their individuality and a positive, confident and enthusiastic attitude to life'. This is met very successfully. Students feel part of a vibrant and challenging community. In the same way as the school is continually trying to improve, so they themselves are challenged to take risks. This prepares them well for the fast-changing world of the 21st Century. Some students feel that the same high-attaining girls tend to get picked each time for sports teams or drama productions and there is some potential to do more to enable other students – who would be high attainers in most schools – to share these positive experiences.
14. An understanding of global issues is central to the school's work. Teachers are very effective in developing students' awareness of themselves and the world around them. Tasks are often set within a real context, making use of community contacts to provide additional relevance. Year 10 students, for example, produced artwork commissioned for display in the police headquarters. Many subjects encourage an awareness of other cultures. In religious education, Year 8 students visit a Hindu temple and in physical education, students consider ethnicity in sport. Although relatively few students are from ethnic minorities, they share their experiences within the school; Muslim girls and a Nepalese student have given talks about their cultures. Many departments organise visits that involve contact with other cultures, ranging from World Challenge expeditions to Madagascar or Guyana to visits to concerts or castles. The school does not have links with multi-ethnic schools within Britain but has plans to establish these.
15. The school itself works exceptionally well as a community. Staff often establish an ethos in which all are co-learners, acting as guides rather than instructors. Students are very helpful to each other: in a fast-paced ICT lesson, for example, some students were getting left behind

and others without fuss helped them to master the intricacies of Excel spreadsheets. They are accustomed to working together. They listen well to each other and most are confident to put forward their own ideas or questions. Students with special educational needs are strongly independent and those with emotional or behaviour difficulties make very good progress in overcoming these.

16. The school is very effective in promoting concern for others. Students regularly support a number of charities through organising events such as Rag Week. Assemblies are thought-provoking and raise awareness of spiritual and moral issues. The school does not provide an act of collective worship for all students every day because it does not have enough large spaces, but it takes every advantage of opportunities such as festivals and significant events to promote spiritual development. On Armistice Day, for example, there was a particularly poignant moment at 11am when two students played the last post while all heads were bowed in contemplation. This was particularly relevant to Year 9 students, who had visited the World War battlefields the previous week. Religious education lessons also provide excellent support for spiritual development. The contribution made by tutor periods at the start of the day varies, depending on the individual form tutor. At best they provide an opportunity for the form to discuss views on topical issues; at worst students sit and chat for 20 minutes.
17. Students' attendance is very high. They want to come to school and there is minimal truancy. Most arrive on time and they move efficiently between lessons. The school has good procedures to monitor attendance and to help students who have been absent to catch up with missed work.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.6	School data	0.0
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

Sixth Form

18. Sixth form students participate keenly in lessons and are interested in learning new ideas. They behave very well and show sustained concentration. They persevere even when they find tasks difficult. Most believe that the school treats them as responsible young adults and are happy with what the school offers. Those who joined the sixth form from other schools, including the boys, feel well-accepted and part of the school community. The sixth form area has a friendly atmosphere. Students are encouraged to develop the self-discipline of independent learning in preparation for further education. In the majority of cases, they rise to this challenge and do not abuse the trust that is shown to them. Tutors provide support when needed, keeping in touch by mobile phone or the internet between face-to-face meetings.
19. Students' personal development is excellent. They are mature and responsible. They work very well together and contribute confidently to debates, listening respectfully and putting forward their views cogently. The light touch from tutors, treating students as co-learners, contributes very well to the very positive climate. Attendance is very good. The school council provides an opportunity for Year 12 and 13 students to contribute to school decision-making as well as to organise events such as the Christmas Pantomime or the charity Rag Fair.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is very good. Teaching is very good overall. The curriculum is very good, with a wide range of opportunities. The school is well resourced with computer equipment and, while

the accommodation is restricted, it is very well maintained. Advice, support and guidance are very good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good at all stages. Half of all lessons are very good or excellent, but a minority of lessons are dull and unchallenging. Assessment procedures are good but there is some variation in how well they are used in different subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are specialists who know their subjects very well and communicate clearly.
- Expectations are high and students are set very challenging work, which they relish.
- Students' attitudes are excellent and make a significant contribution to their progress.
- Independent learning is encouraged in many lessons and is a major school development.
- There is a small proportion of uninspiring lessons.

Commentary

20. Teachers' very good subject knowledge underpins teaching in all subjects and, as a result, students gain a clear understanding of key concepts. Explanations are authoritative and in many lessons are made even clearer through good PowerPoint presentations. Most lessons are very well planned, with a variety of activities that keep them interesting and deepen learning. In ICT, for example, the work is motivating because it is set in a real business context. Teachers have very high expectations and in almost all lessons the work makes very high intellectual demands. Students respond enthusiastically to the challenges they are set and their excellent attitudes are a significant factor in their high achievement. In many of the best lessons, teachers encourage students to think for themselves by asking pertinent questions. Lively discussions are a feature of lessons in English, history and religious education. Students make very good use of computers to do research and to present their work. In design and technology, music and mathematics they develop their skills through using specialist software, but they have no opportunities to use computers in art and few in modern foreign languages. Homework is set regularly in all subjects and reinforces and extends classwork well. Some parents were concerned that there is too much homework but most students believe that the amount is appropriate, though teachers do not always keep to the timetable.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 202 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
19 (9.4%)	81 (40.1%)	65 (32.2%)	36 (17.8%)	1 (0.5%)	0	0

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

21. One lesson in ten is excellent: in these, students are stimulated to very high levels of independent thought through teachers' skill in planning imaginative activities and managing classroom work. The level of intellectual challenge is exceptionally high and learning is often deepened by links that are made between different parts of the subject. Students are engrossed and work very well together, learning from each other as well as the teacher.
22. There are a small number of lessons where teaching is not of best quality. A few mathematics and history lessons lack challenge, for example, and students learn passively. In art and ICT, students do not have enough opportunities to discuss their ideas. Teaching in all subjects is monitored regularly but more use needs to be made of the outcomes to ensure that best practice is shared and that the quality is consistently high.

23. Students are well disposed to the many opportunities they have to learn independently. They make very good use of books, videos and the internet to do research in English, art, design and technology, geography, history and physical education. Students collaborate very well in small groups to solve problems, plan presentations and review each other's work, particularly in business education, design and technology and ICT. Independent learning is well established in Year 7 lessons where tablet PCs are used. Although there are some technical teething problems, the tablets make a significant contribution to learning in English, mathematics, history, geography and religious studies. In these lessons, students use well-planned materials posted by teachers on the school's intranet, such as instruction sheets, maps or virtual tours. E-learning enhances other lessons too, including business education and ICT, giving students access to learning targets or model examination answers. This enables the teacher to be used as an additional learning resource. Independent learning is less well developed in citizenship and modern foreign languages, and in science it is mainly limited to directed practical work. Independent learning is a major school priority in its drive to raise standards further and promote personal development. Several curriculum developments have been introduced to support independent learning, including fortnightly focus days, in which the normal timetable is suspended in order to study a topic in greater depth. Most teachers are committed to this ideal and make good use of focus days and tablet PCs. However, teachers do not all have a shared understanding of what is meant by independent learning and to take the initiative forward there is a need for policy development and training.

Example of outstanding practice

Challenge, inspiration and innovation are the hallmarks of the English department.

Its teachers are in the vanguard of the school's initiative to compress Key Stage 3 into two years. In Year 7 the frequent use of ICT in the tablet project results in the rapid development of independent learning skills. Other e-learning initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 English web-site provide an excellent forum for the students' writing. PowerPoint presentations clarify learning and increase its pace in many lessons. Precise implementation of literacy strategy methods accelerates learning. In Year 9 the challenge of the 'Classics in Literature' module is immense. Far from being daunted by the difficulty of 'Gulliver's Travels' or 'Jane Eyre', students revel in the close analysis of plot, style, theme, setting and character. Yet there is nothing dry about the lively, inventive writing in a range of genres that emerges from this module. Fast-paced pair and group work feature prominently in lessons, interspersed with engrossed concentration on quality writing. Year 10 and 11 students confirm that the AS literature course 'really stretches us' but, inspired by demanding multi-media teaching and learning on difficult texts and concepts, they rise to the challenge.

24. Lessons have been recently been shortened as a consequence of the introduction of focus days. This is restricting learning in some practical subjects, including physical education, design and technology and art, because students do not have enough time to practise skills or evaluate their work properly at the end of the lesson. The shorter lessons also restrict independent learning in science. In the year preceding the inspection, staffing difficulties in science, art and ICT were another barrier to learning, but these have now been largely resolved.
25. Students with special educational needs are taught very well because their individual needs are very well known and teachers are careful to take account of them in their planning. Those with specific learning difficulties, including visual and hearing impairment, are very well supported by visiting specialists.
26. Assessment procedures are good, though there is some variation in how well they are used in different subjects. Assessment has improved well since the last inspection but appropriately remains a school priority for further development. The procedures are systematic: students' work is assessed formally each term in each subject and the results are collected centrally and reported to parents. These assessments are done thoroughly and, on a whole-school basis, are used well to monitor students' progress. Within subjects, monitoring of progress is done well in mathematics, science and business education, for example, but less well in history and ICT. Assessment procedures are under development in art, music and citizenship.

27. Students are set targets in each subject for their performance at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. These are based on prior attainment, though students say they would like more discussion in order to understand how likely they are to reach their targets and what they need to do. Students are aware of their targets and in general terms how well they are doing. However, subjects vary in how well they support students' independent learning through informing them of what they need to do to meet their targets. In English, the feedback given in formal assessments is highly informative. In modern languages, however, students are less clear on how to improve and in science, they need a clearer idea of the assessment criteria when planning their coursework.

Sixth form

28. Sixth form teaching provides very rigorous challenge. Lessons are well planned and structured. Expectations are very high and lessons move at a brisk pace. Teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements and, as a result, students are very well guided in their studies. Only in health and social care do teachers lack expertise in parts of the subject. Sixth form students much appreciate the combination of encouragement to study independently with ready access to teachers' support. In science and ICT, for example, students answer test questions online and in history and geography, teachers provide many useful web-sites for research. Students often prepare presentations for the rest of the class and lively debates take place in many lessons, especially in English. There are a minority of lessons in history, ICT and mathematics where students' learning is passive because teaching is unimaginative. Students are enthusiastic and very productive, though progress is slowed in health and social care by some absence and very occasionally students are too passive in theatre studies.
29. Assessment in the sixth form is very good. A major factor in the rapid rise in A-level results since the last inspection has been careful individual target setting and close monitoring of progress. Students receive very good feedback in most subjects and know what they have to do to improve their work and reach their targets. Students who underachieve receive additional support.

The curriculum

The curriculum is very good overall though statutory requirements are not fully met in design and technology in Years 10 and 11. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. The curriculum is supported well by good staffing, accommodation and resources.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is very innovative in providing new opportunities that challenge students to reach even higher standards and develop a wide range of personal skills.
- There is extensive enrichment through focus days, trips and many extra-curricular activities.
- The accommodation is well maintained, with very good display of students' work. There is insufficient accommodation for all students to take design and technology in Years 10 and 11.
- Students have many opportunities to use computers.
- There is no timetabled programme of recreational sport in the sixth form.

Commentary

30. The school takes a very innovative approach to the curriculum in order to raise achievement as much as possible and improve students' capacity to learn independently. Several major new initiatives were introduced in September 2003 – the accelerated curriculum, focus days, the tablet PC project and the school's business and enterprise status. The management of the curriculum is very good, with strong support from the governors. The initiatives are based on a thorough analysis of performance data and planning has been careful, including a risk assessment carried out by the governors.

31. For the new Year 7 students, the work normally covered in Years 7 to 9 will be completed by the end of Year 8, with GCSE courses starting in Year 9. The intention is to provide additional challenge and raise standards at GCSE and A level. The school has carefully considered future implications and all students will be able to take GCSE or A-level courses at the time that suits them, regardless of year group. Early indications are that lessons in Year 7 are benefiting from the additional pace and challenge and students are reaching higher standards.
32. One day each fortnight, the normal timetable is suspended and students take part in a focus day in order to explore a topic in greater depth. Each year group has a different activity, organised by one of the departments. Focus days are well organised, with good staff leadership and teamwork. Students enjoy the variety and the extended challenges, though they note that a few of the activities have been less well organised. Focus days provide additional opportunities to work independently and to collaborate. One group of Year 8 students said that they had learned that 'There is no I in teamwork'. Through students' working together on new ideas, focus days reinforce the school's culture of innovation, belonging and emphasis on achievement.
33. The school is well resourced with computers. In September 2003, all Year 7 students were provided with portable tablet PCs to provide them with ready access to the internet and develop their ICT and independent learning skills. Teachers also have tablets and many use them to enhance their teaching with clear presentations. The project has encountered some technical difficulties and its scale has been reduced. It is, however, having a positive impact in several subject areas. Students have been quick to learn the potential of the tablets to do research and organise their work. In religious education, for example, they make virtual visits to mosques using the internet.
34. The business and enterprise plan aims to raise standards particularly in mathematics, ICT and business education, to promote an ethos of enterprise in the school and to extend the external links with business and other schools. The plan builds on existing business and enterprise initiatives and includes good management structures to develop and evaluate each area. The first capital project – a mezzanine internet café built over the dining hall – is already complete and the plan has very good potential for future development. It is already showing impact on the enterprise activities and culture in the school.
35. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 has many strengths. Drama is taught in addition to the normal subjects and helps to develop speaking and listening skills. All students take two modern foreign languages. In many subjects, teachers choose challenging, innovative topics that make a positive impact on the students' achievement. There is very good provision for students with special educational needs.
36. In Years 10 and 11, all students take English and mathematics and GCSE short courses in ICT, citizenship and religious education. Most students take double award science, though they have the option to take three separate sciences. Students choose from a wide range of GCSE options, including business education. Higher-attaining students are offered additional challenge in English, mathematics and religious education through starting AS-level courses in Year 10. For a small number of students who require a more vocational education, there is an effective work-related programme, which results in improved attendance and more positive attitudes. The school does not have enough workshops for all students to take a GCSE in design and technology, but those who wish to follow the course are able to do so.
37. Gifted and talented students are provided for well through the accelerated curriculum and through the many enrichment activities. Additional provision in conjunction with other local schools is planned through the school's involvement in Excellence in Cities. The support for students with special educational needs is very well planned to meet their specific needs. Students have full access to the curriculum and well-targeted support from specialist teachers and local education authority staff. Each student's programme is kept under careful review and they have effective special arrangements in examinations.

38. There are extensive extra-curricular activities in music, sport and drama and many trips organised by subjects. In music, many students receive instrumental lessons and take part in concerts. The sports programme is very popular: older students and staff help with activities and good use is made of local clubs and fitness facilities to encourage students to continue physical activity after leaving school. Many students are involved in an exciting programme of dramatic productions. In geography, fieldwork extends students' learning and in history, well-planned visits add depth to the curriculum. Students have opportunities to further their citizenship skills in community activities and in the school council.
39. The school manages its resources and accommodation very well. The developments to the curriculum are given additional strength by an enterprising approach to improving the facilities. Students and parents appreciate this progressive approach. The school receives an average level of income and the accommodation is very limited for the number of students. However, it is very well maintained and has been extended through the school's own efforts on more than one occasion. Very good displays all round the school celebrate achievement and add positively to students' learning. There are too few science laboratories and design and technology workshops and limited accommodation in art. The physical education changing rooms are too small and there are no shower facilities. Textbooks and equipment are sufficient and suitable. The school has more computers than is typical and through their imaginative use applies new technology well to many areas of learning.

Sixth form

40. The sixth form curriculum offers a very wide range of academic A-level courses as well as vocational courses in ICT, health and social care and business education. These courses meet students' aspirations well, though the range of vocational courses is limited. All students take A-level general studies, in which results have been well above average. Many subjects are well supported by links with local businesses and foreign countries. Students taking modern foreign languages, for example, have the opportunity to do work experience in Germany or France. Geography is enhanced by a residential field trip in Cornwall and religious education by a trip to Auschwitz. The focus days provide opportunities for extended study in each subject and provide the time for general studies and religious education. Examination courses are offered in physical education but there is no other programme of recreational sport in the timetable. Older students, however, do help with younger students clubs and play in regular school fixtures, reaching high standards. Extra-curricular drama is of a very high quality.

Care, guidance and support

There are good arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety. The school provides students with very good support, advice and guidance and involves them very well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent induction procedures ensure a smooth transfer from some 40 to 50 primary schools.
- Careers education and work experience are very well organised and effective.
- Child protection procedures are effective but staff briefing needs to be more detailed.

Commentary

41. Health and safety procedures are very good. They are rigorously applied and regularly monitored by the governing body. The school nurse provides good care. Child protection procedures fulfil requirements and are effective in practice; staff are regularly briefed but need to receive more detailed information on the procedures.

42. Teachers and other staff know students well and anticipate their needs. There is a good rapport and mutual respect between students and staff. The ethos of the school encourages students to think and sort out problems for themselves and in this way promotes personal development. The school has recently reviewed its arrangements for student support and has developed an innovative approach. Pastoral support is provided by student support managers who are not teachers and therefore have more time to resolve problems. Their work is overseen by a senior teacher and assistant headteacher. Although it is early days, initial evidence suggests that the approach is working well, with both students and staff appreciating the service offered.
43. There are excellent induction arrangements. They are planned over the full calendar year in which girls join the school and include, for example, a visit to every prospective student in their primary school. Great care is taken in planning the initial timetable and tutor evening for the new intake in September. As a result, Year 7 students settle quickly.
44. Students' progress in relation to their academic targets is monitored carefully by the key stage managers. Those who achieve well receive commendation letters, which are appreciated by parents and students. Students who underachieve are quickly identified and receive additional support. Students receive very good guidance in choosing their options. They are also given effective guidance on how to find out about careers and further education choices. A well-organised work experience programme at the end of Year 11 gives students good insight into the world of work.
45. Students with special educational needs are very well supported. Their progress is carefully monitored through testing and regular review. The objectives in their Statements of Special Educational Needs are fulfilled well, though targets in their individual education plans are not specific enough for the progress made in achieving them to be measured accurately. The school goes to great lengths to support students with specific needs, such as those with visual or hearing impairment.
46. The school takes students' views seriously. The governors' student support committee holds discussion with students each term. Students' views are regularly discussed in the school council, though younger students believe that this is more effective in the sixth form. Year 10 students have been helping in the management of the tablet project. The school employs a market research company to survey students' opinions every two years and takes action on the outcomes. The results have not, however, been shared with the students.

Sixth form

47. Students receive very good support and guidance in the sixth form. Induction arrangements are very effective and include a team-building day which is much valued by students. Students regularly meet their tutors in Year 12 but in Year 13 each has a personal tutor and is given greater responsibility for their own development. Year 13 students have a group tutorial every two weeks and a personal tutorial once a term. They can seek additional time with their tutor as required. In addition the Year 13 manager interviews each student individually. A major aim of the guidance is to support students in developing the self-reliance they will require at university. The arrangements are effective and are appreciated by students.
48. Most subjects provide students with very good feedback on their work. Work is regularly assessed and students' progress is carefully monitored by their tutors and the upper school management team. Where any student appears to be underachieving in relation to their targets they receive additional support. This careful monitoring of progress is a key factor in students' very good achievement.
49. The information and advice on higher education, training, and employment is very good and includes visits to four universities. Individual subjects also have very productive links with universities ensuring that students are fully prepared and able to make informed choices for the next stage of their education.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are very good links with parents, who are very supportive of the school. There are also very good links with the community and other schools and colleges, not just in Maidstone but on a worldwide basis.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very appreciative of the school.
- There are excellent procedures to gather parents' views, which are followed up well.
- The school sees itself as part of a world community and uses its local and international links to encourage students to think beyond local boundaries.
- Very good links with local organisations bring considerable benefit to students' learning.

Commentary

50. Parents almost all hold the school in high regard and are generally very supportive. Parents' voluntary financial support was important to the success of the business and enterprise college bid. The Friends of Invicta Grammar School also contributed to the bid as part of their ongoing support through fundraising and social events. Most parents provide their children with appropriate support in completing homework.
51. The school's prospectus gives an eloquent account of the school's aims and work and the governors' annual report provides a clear perspective on how the governing body has fulfilled its responsibilities. Regular newsletters inform parents about school life. Most families have internet access and parents can keep in touch through the school's very good web-site. Annual reports on students' progress are satisfactory. They contain very clear information on attainment in relation to national standards and students' own targets; teachers' comments on individual subjects are often useful.
52. The school is diligent in seeking and acting on parents' views. Every two years, it uses a market research company to survey and summarise parents' views. Areas that are considered less strong are reviewed with a view to making improvements. The quality and speed of response to parents' suggestions or complaints have been significantly improved by new management structures, including the appointment of the student support managers.
53. The school has very good links with other schools, sometimes in a supportive role. Pupils in a local special school, for example, complete records of achievement with the help of Invicta's students and careers adviser. The school is very supportive in its collaboration with other local schools in projects such as Excellence in Cities. There are also very good links with colleges and commercial organisations. A recent Year 8 engineering fun day on alternative energy, for example, was run in conjunction with City University. Focus days are enhanced by visiting speakers, such as BBC producers talking about current issues in the media or nurses from the local hospital on healthcare issues. The business and enterprise plan will extend the school's support for other schools and its links with businesses.
54. The school places great emphasis on its links with the wider world. The governors have an external links committee and an assistant headteacher has a particular responsibility for this area. Many national and international links provide students with a rich range of experiences. The school is a member of World School – a group of schools and colleges from over 20 countries, with delegates meeting once a year in places such as America, Japan or, in 2004, Invicta Grammar School. The school's support for disabled people in Romania involves some students in going to the country and helping to take them on holiday – a profound experience for those that participate. Students also support the local women's refuge, which brings home the social problems on their doorstep as they help to set up a resource centre and run a homework club for the children.

Sixth Form

55. Many sixth form students take advantage of the school's extensive external links. They take part in language exchanges in several countries; visit Towson University for history, Barcelona for art, Paris and Milan for textiles and New York for business studies. The community work programme provides opportunities for students to contribute to others and develop as individuals. The business and enterprise plan is strongly supported by the wide range of enterprise activities students carry out with local companies and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff is very good. Governance is very good. Management is very good and financial management is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides very clear direction in establishing the school's key aims and driving continuous improvement and innovation.
- There is very good teamwork and leadership from key staff.
- Governors give very good support in strategic planning and monitoring school performance.
- All available funding is used very well to improve the facilities and support curriculum developments.
- The school monitors its work thoroughly but the outcomes are not used consistently enough to improve all teaching to the standard of the best.

Commentary

56. The headteacher successfully communicates a very clear vision of an innovative school, with strong links to the outside world, which promotes achievement in conjunction with personal development and enables students to become independent and enterprising. This vision is understood and shared by teachers, students and most parents. The headteacher also provides very strong determination that the school should keep improving and developing.
57. The headteacher is very well supported by the senior leadership group and by other school managers and staff. There is very good teamwork and very good leadership by middle managers. On focus days, for example, heads of subject and other staff successfully organise and lead the work of a large number of students and staff. Many support staff show a high level of commitment to the school and are much more involved with students and education than is often the case. The involvement of students and staff in the school's new developments, such as focus days or the tablet project, helps to establish the school's ethos and sense of shared values.
58. The governing body is exceptionally well organised and energetic and provides the school with very good support in its drive to raise standards and improve provision. Governors have a wide range of expertise which is used very well for the school's benefit. They are fully involved in strategic planning, regularly spending a full day with senior staff to evaluate progress and plan new developments. In planning the use of finance and provision of new facilities, governors make a very strong contribution to the school's development. They have a clear understanding of their role in monitoring the school's performance and a very good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. They also review their own performance and seek to increase their effectiveness. Two statutory requirements are not met. The school lacks the accommodation to provide all students in Years 10 and 11 with a course in design and technology. Since the last inspection, the governors have made every effort to rectify this and from its own funding the school has extended the technology block, but is still short of workshops. Accommodation difficulties also prevent the school from providing a daily act of collective worship, though

through other opportunities students' spiritual development is supported very well. Since governors' contribution is in all other respects outstanding, governance is judged very good overall.

59. Within the limitations of its selective entrance requirements, the school's equality of opportunity is very good. This is a high priority for the school and is monitored by the governors' student support committee. The small number of students with special education needs are very well supported and there are good systems to identify other students who need additional support. The performance of minority groups such as ethnic minorities, travellers and sixth form boys is monitored and these students achieve as well as others. The school's accommodation is unsuitable for students with physical disabilities, but in its new building programme there are plans to begin to address this. The school offers financial assistance as appropriate for students whose families cannot afford educational trips.
60. Strategic planning is very good. It is driven jointly by the senior leadership group and governors. The priorities are appropriate: they support the school's long-term aims and build on the existing high standards to increase the level of challenge and independence. The whole-school plan is very well structured, with arrangements for governors to monitor each priority. The plan is very well presented in a pocket-sized booklet and is used regularly by governors and staff as a reference document. Departmental planning is good, but not of such a high quality. The objectives are broadly linked to the school priorities, but most plans do not include arrangements for monitoring progress or criteria against which success can be measured.
61. Financial management is excellent. There are very clear links between planning and spending. A very disciplined approach to budgeting ensures that each year the existing curriculum is adequately resourced and there are significant funds available for developments. Day-to-management of finances is very careful and financial reports to governors are well designed to give them exactly the information they require. As a result, the school makes regular improvements to its facilities that underpin the curriculum innovations and help to support its ethos as a progressive school. In the light of its very good standards and provision, the school gives very good value for money.

Example of outstanding practice

The school's income is average, yet through excellent financial management it is regularly able to improve its buildings and equipment to support new curriculum developments and the school ethos.

The governors and senior management have a disciplined and entrepreneurial approach to financial planning. Annual budgeting is guided by the principle that the basic formula fund is sufficient to maintain existing activities, which at times requires considerable discipline. All additional funds, including the carry-forward and specific grants, then form a significant discretionary fund. The use of the discretionary fund is guided by the development plan. Each priority in the development plan is overseen by one of the governors' committees; these prepare bids for consideration and are all represented on the finance committee. Supported by very good financial control within the school, governors are thus able to keep the school up-to-date with technology and to extend the buildings using loans that are repaid over some years. The school is also very active in raising additional funds through specific projects, which pay for further developments such as the innovative use of ICT. Students and parents appreciate the continual improvements and the progressive ethos that they engender.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,538,707	Balance from previous year	180,417
Total expenditure	3,581,834	Balance carried forward to the next	137,290
Expenditure per student	2,858		

62. The arrangements for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are good and are much improved since the last inspection. There are clear expectations for heads of subject, who write an annual report on performance, lesson observations and students' views. These reports are discussed with the headteacher. The senior leadership group also monitor teaching. While the monitoring activities and reports provide a regular check on quality, they are not used systematically enough to ensure that all teaching is brought up to the quality of the best. In addition, while there is good communication between senior and middle managers, there is not enough regular monitoring of departmental work such as planning or assessment.
63. Staff development is very good. The induction of new staff is very well organised and new teachers feel well supported. The school is also effective in initial teacher training. Performance management is used very effectively to support individual and school development. In-service training is well managed. The school fulfils all the requirements of the Investors in People award. Very good progress has been made in workforce reform: support staff are used in many creative ways to enable teachers to focus on teaching. As a result, the work of the support staff is closely integrated with that of teachers, thus increasing their commitment to the school.
64. Good use is made of examination and assessment data to check on the school's performance, diagnose strengths and weaknesses and plan improvements. The school regularly compares its performance with other schools and, in particular, other Kent grammar schools. It uses value-added data well to set targets and review progress. The school's targets for GCSE performance are very accurate. The quality of reporting is not as good as the analysis. There are very good summary reports of A-level performance in each subject but there is a lack of clear, simple reports to enable governors and managers to easily identify strengths and weaknesses in performance.

Sixth form

65. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The aims of the sixth form are integral to the aims of the whole school. One consequence of this is that in a recent reorganisation of student support, the school has created an Upper School consisting of Years 11 to 13. This is partly to ensure a smooth progression into the sixth form and partly because in some subjects, such as English and religious education, AS-level courses are begun in Year 10. The school's long-term strategy is to raise standards further by completing GCSE in Year 10 in order that students can spend three years on a deeper study of A-level courses.
66. The sixth form team is overseen by a director of studies, who monitors students' progress. Leadership within the team is innovative and dedicated to ensuring that students fulfil their aspirations. Management structures are well considered and there is good delegation of responsibilities. Good communication with sixth form tutors enables them to give students very good support and guidance.
67. Sixth form finances are well managed. There is an appropriate balance between the income and expenditure of the main school and the sixth form, though this is not overtly monitored.

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 **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are consistently very high and well above the average for selective schools.
- The department's highly innovative approach leads to inspirational teaching and learning.
- Teaching challenges students and leads to very good achievement.
- The leadership of the department is excellent and teachers form a very effective team.
- Most marking is very good but the best practice needs to be more widespread.
- Some questioning and reviews of learning during lessons could be better managed.

Commentary

68. The Year 9 national test results in 2003 were very high and well above the average for selective schools. Seven out of ten students gained the highest Level 7, which was significantly more than in 2002. GCSE results in English and English literature were very high in 2002 and similar in 2003. In both subjects, six out of ten students gained A or A* grades.
69. For current students, standards are very high in Years 9 and 11 and achievement is very good. In Year 9 they speak with a high degree of fluency and respond thoughtfully to what they hear. Their evaluations of their classmates' drama presentations are articulate and objective, yet expressed with courtesy. When reading, they identify stylistic features of Gothic literature and analyse with insight how Bronte portrays Jane Eyre's state of mind. Their writing is very well organised and very accurate, although some students are confused about the rules governing vowel blends and suffixes. In Years 10 and 11, students participate fluently in speaking and listening tasks. Their coursework includes very good discursive and analytical writing. Their response to literature is detailed and evaluative. The achievement of gifted and talented students on the innovative AS literature course is excellent, because the course is so well-matched to their abilities. Other students are on course to achieve high grades in GCSE literature. Most students write at standards associated with grade A or higher in English language. Weaknesses in clarity of formal expression prevent a small number attaining these very high grades.
70. Teaching and learning are very good throughout Years 7 to 11. Teachers use their specialist knowledge to give students a very good understanding of texts and of the features that make writing more effective. Activities are well-matched to the lesson's objectives and are motivating through their variety. Students are encouraged to work independently and collaborate very well in pairs or groups. The marking of formal assessment tasks encourages students by recognising their strengths and setting out clear targets for improvement. Some of the marking in exercise books is also of this high standard but some is less informative. Teachers' high expectations are demonstrated in the demanding texts and written tasks. Homework is challenging, requiring students to apply independently the skills and knowledge they acquire in lessons. The department has made good progress in implementing parts of the national literacy strategy but features such as sharing lesson objectives and reviewing learning during and at the end of lessons are not implemented consistently. Although students respond enthusiastically in question and answer sessions, teachers do not consistently ensure that students have the chance to respond to each other's suggestions.

71. Leadership is excellent. The head of department's enthusiasm and commitment are emulated by his team and teamwork is very good. The department is highly innovative. Its implementation of the tablet PC project in Year 7 is inventive and leads to outstanding independent learning. The introduction of the AS literature course in Years 10 and 11 has increased the challenge for higher attainers. Teachers make good use of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades to assess and track students' progress. However, more frequent reference to the assessment criteria would further clarify students' understanding of how to improve. The department is very well managed. Standards have improved since the previous inspection, representing good improvement.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

72. Standards of literacy are very high and enable students to achieve very well. They communicate their knowledge of subjects very clearly in writing. They read fluently, with very good comprehension, and make effective use of higher order reading skills such as skimming and scanning. They are fluent speakers and thoroughly enjoy discussions.
73. Other subjects make very good provision for the development of literacy skills. Teachers consistently place a strong emphasis on the use of technical vocabulary and hence students are accurate in its use. In religious education, for example, teachers support students' writing by giving examples of different genres. Most subjects incorporate structured discussion in pairs, groups or the whole class. Teachers have been trained effectively and subject leaders are required to include literacy issues when writing schemes of work. Clear and sensible policies give good guidance on the main aspects of literacy and on how to deal with spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are strongly motivated and standards in all three languages are very high.
- Several teachers use the foreign language as their sole means of communication in lessons.
- There are many opportunities for enrichment outside lessons.
- Language teachers are innovative and have very good plans for future development.
- Younger students do not make enough use of ICT in school.

Commentary

74. GCSE results in 2002 were very high in relation to national averages in French, German and Spanish. The students entered for German gained better results than they did in their other subjects. The 2003 GCSE results maintained this very high standard, though in all languages students did as well as in their other subjects.
75. For current students, standards in all three languages are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Students of all ages achieve very well because they are highly motivated to learn languages and put considerable effort into developing their skills in lessons. They make rapid and steady progress. Those who are gifted or talented achieve as well as all the others.
76. Teaching is very good in French and German and good in Spanish. All teachers have excellent command of their subject and establish very good relationships with their classes. Lessons are well paced and students learn quickly and effectively. A strong feature of most lessons is the sustained use of the foreign language by teachers, though this is less well developed in Spanish. Students are capable of working independently and work very well collaboratively. In the very best lessons, the teacher adopts a low profile, using strategies which enable students to initiate conversation in the foreign language and learn successfully from each other. Students

receive appropriate, regular homework and often use ICT at home, though the use of computers in school is not frequent, especially for younger students. Some teachers use ICT resources effectively themselves; good examples occurred in both French and German lessons where teachers used their tablet PCs to make an arresting presentation on the whiteboard. Assessment procedures are improving. Students in Years 7 to 9 are aware of their levels of attainment, but are not yet able to describe in detail what they need to do in order to improve. In Years 10 and 11, teachers give students regular information about the grades they can expect at GCSE and compare these with their previous attainment in order to check that they do their best.

77. Leadership is very good in French and German, with a coherent vision of future developments expressed by both departments. Aspirations in both languages are high and have a positive impact on the standards achieved in lessons. In Spanish, leadership is good: a very good team has been created but has not yet articulated a sufficiently ambitious vision of how the subject will develop. Management is good in French and German and satisfactory in Spanish. The departments work well together and systematically pilot new developments such as encouraging students to speak more fluently in class. The organisation of the numerous exchanges and links abroad is very efficient and the drive to encourage students to work more independently is very promising. Development priorities are highly appropriate and staff often spend their own time creating relevant and up-to-date materials. The departments are starting to monitor their own work, but some aspects, including teaching methods and marking, lack consistency both within and between the languages. Good support is provided for inexperienced staff, but there is not enough sharing of good practice. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous very positive inspection when standards were reported as well above average.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high.
- Very good leadership provides a focus on raising attainment.
- ICT is used very well and helps to raise students' attainment.
- Curriculum developments are providing students with additional challenge.
- Most teaching engages students, but good practice in teaching is not shared sufficiently.
- Students' attendance at lunchtime help sessions is very low.

Commentary

78. GCSE results in 2002 were very high and well above those of similar schools. Results have improved over recent years, although they declined a little in 2003. Students do as well as in their other subjects. Year 9 test results were also very high in 2002 and 2003. They were broadly in line with similar schools, though fewer students gained the highest levels. Students' progress from their attainment on entry was better than expected.
79. For current students, standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and their achievement is good. Students learn and use skills well in all areas of mathematics. By the end of Year 9, higher-attaining students thoroughly understand how to calculate the probability of combined events and rapidly solve simultaneous equations. Lower-attaining students understand how to use dimensions to check formulae for area and volume. Throughout Years 7 to 9 students use ICT very well in their mathematics. The use of tablet PCs in Year 7 encourages students' independent thinking and accelerates learning. Students also use ICT well in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11 higher attainers are very proficient in using graphical software, and this helps them to understand complex curves. However, some Year 11 students have difficulty in using algebra to describe their findings in their coursework

investigations. Higher-attaining students in Year 10 are studying AS-level statistics and have a good understanding of correlation. Students with special needs are well supported and make good progress.

80. The quality of teaching is good throughout. Teachers have good subject knowledge and in most lessons support students' learning well through high expectations, good planning and appropriate challenge. They use teaching methods that engage students well and ask questions that stimulate them to think and solve problems. Teachers present concepts clearly, often using computer displays, and provide good individual support. Students' very positive attitudes contribute significantly to good learning. In a minority of lessons, teaching is less effective and progress is only satisfactory. These lessons lack pace and challenge, particularly during the introduction; students are passive during presentations then practise repetitive exercises.
81. Leadership is very good, with a clear vision and drive to raise standards. Teachers with responsibilities are effective and a very positive team spirit pervades. Students are set accurate targets and their progress is monitored carefully. Curriculum developments are managed effectively and the business and enterprise plan is beginning to have a positive effect on standards. However, the departmental development plan is not closely linked to the school development plan and it is not clear how progress will be checked. Teaching is monitored regularly but good practice is not shared sufficiently and specific teaching strategies to raise attainment at the highest level are not included in the schemes of work. Students' learning is enriched by the UK Mathematics Challenge and an effective puzzles club, but the lunchtime help sessions are poorly attended.
82. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards and teaching have improved. Students' progress is better supported through assessment and target-setting. There have been improvements in planning and monitoring. New curriculum developments are raising standards.

Mathematics across the curriculum

83. The support for mathematics and numeracy in other subjects is very good. Students are confident to apply their mathematical skills and are taught well how to present their work. Through their work in other subjects, they extend their skills in number, algebra, graphs and problem-solving. In science, for example, younger students confidently use calculators, bar charts and graphs, while in ICT they use formulae well in creating spreadsheets that model real situations. In art and design, students use their geometric skills to present the three-dimensional world in two dimensions. Older students carry out calculations effectively to draw conclusions in citizenship, history and business studies. Although there is useful departmental and school guidance on numeracy, its effectiveness is limited because it is not often referred to within the department.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good** and improving.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge which is used well to prepare students for external tests and examinations.
- Standards are very high; students have a good grasp of concepts and apply them well.
- Teaching is good overall, but is too variable and very occasionally unsatisfactory.
- Assessment does not involve students enough in assessing their own performance.
- Students' capabilities for independent learning are underutilised.

Commentary

84. Year 9 test results in 2003 were very high in relation to the national average. They showed a significant improvement from 2002 and were similar to those of other selective schools. GCSE examination results are also very high and similar to those of other selective schools, though in 2003, students did less well than in their other subjects.
85. For current students, standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Achievement is good overall. It is supported by the students' very good attitudes and the department's ethos of high expectations, but varies with the quality of the teaching. Students have a very good understanding of concepts and recall facts well. They use their very good numeracy, literacy and practical skills to apply their knowledge. In completing their GCSE coursework they develop very good skills in analysing data and drawing conclusions. In other lessons, however, they get too few opportunities to practise these higher-order skills. Students achieve very high standards because of teachers' expertise and commitment. The achievement of lower-attaining and average students is good but their rate of learning is not as fast as that of the highest-attaining students.
86. Teaching and learning are good overall. Lessons are very well planned and ICT is used very well to engage students in whole class teaching. Learning objectives are commonly shared with students at the start of lessons and in the best lessons these are referred to throughout to help students assess their learning. In most lessons teachers respond well to students but where teaching is very occasionally unsatisfactory it is because students' questions are not adequately answered. The accelerated Key Stage 3 curriculum is effectively raising standards in Year 7. In one class, students achieved a very good understanding of particles by describing their mental images. One student described particles in gas as like 'popcorn popping'. Independent study is mainly limited to practical work directed by the teacher and is also restricted by the short lessons and limited size of some rooms. In a very well-managed chemistry lesson, however, Year 10 students worked in teams to share results and decide on the most economic quantities to use for making pure salt. Their cooperation and achievement were excellent. Marking is thorough, with useful diagnostic comments. One piece of work is assessed in depth each half term, but teachers' assessment of other work is too variable. Students know their target grades but some are unsure about how their day-to-day work matches expectations or what they need to do to improve. Students complete homework diligently and have good research skills. ICT is used well to present work but its use for data handling is less well developed.
87. The curriculum is very well managed and the three sciences are well coordinated. Team teaching was used effectively in a Year 10 focus day and contributed to sharing of good practice. Good use has been made of the Key Stage 3 national strategy to improve lesson planning. Student' progress towards their targets is tracked carefully. However, the evaluation of progress in implementing plans needs a more rigorous use of evidence. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, though the head of science has been in post for a year and recent changes have not yet had time to impact fully on achievement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high by the end of Year 11 and students achieve well.
- The curriculum is flexible and students take GCSE early.
- Students learn with a high degree of independence.
- Assessment does not provide students or staff with enough information on progress.

Commentary

88. All students take a short GCSE course in ICT. Results have been consistently very high in relation to the national average.
89. For current students, standards are well above average at the end of Year 9 and very high at the end of Year 11. Achievement for all students, including those with special educational needs, is good. Students have a very good understanding of most commonly used software packages. They have very good skills in using databases, with an excellent understanding of relational tables, forms and reports. They create effective PowerPoint presentations, though these do not always show a good awareness of their target audience. Students have a very good understanding of the impact of computers in society and are well aware, for example, of the dangers of posting personal information on the internet. In their design and technology and mathematics lessons, they gain a broad understanding of how computers can be used to control events. However, their understanding of the quality of different software is not deep enough to make informed decisions when choosing an appropriate package for their work. Many students make good use of the computers at lunchtime and after school to develop and consolidate their skills.
90. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to focus learning on the key concepts. Work is challenging and motivating because it is given relevance by being set in a business context. Teachers make good use of the digital projectors to demonstrate skills and thus accelerate learning. Students are encouraged to learn independently and use the teacher as a learning resource. They are motivated by teachers' flexible approach which allows them to choose the context of their work. Lesson planning does not always provide a focused start to the lesson or enough time for students to discuss their ideas in groups. Students' behaviour and attitudes are always very good.
91. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum is innovative, including early entry for GCSE that allows students to take advanced courses before the sixth form. A very impressive range of resources, many on the internet, are being developed to support students' independent learning. The department is well placed to meet its targets in the business and enterprise college plan. Marking is good but assessment does not provide students with target grades or details on their progress towards meeting them.
92. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and the good standard of teaching has been maintained. The curriculum has been expanded and now includes the use of computers to control events.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

93. Students' learning in many subjects is supported by good use of computers. There has been a recent audit of computer use and the school is now including ICT in all subjects' schemes of work. Students have many opportunities to develop their communication skills, through word processing for example. They also have many opportunities to use email and do research on the internet. In some English, geography, history and mathematics lessons, students make good use of materials on the school's intranet to learn independently. This is particularly successful in Year 7 lessons where the tablet PCs are used. Although there are some teething problems, most students use the tablets successfully, with a positive impact on their learning. In modern foreign languages and science, however, students have only limited opportunities to use computers. In art, a lack of specialist software hinders the development of graphics skills. The opportunities for students to apply spreadsheet and database skills are limited outside ICT lessons. Many students practise their computer skills in the ICT suite and library during lunchtime and after school.

Example of outstanding practice

In a Year 7 history lesson, students' learning about the medieval church was enhanced by the use of a PowerPoint presentation and tablet PCs.

The teacher's probing questioning helped students to recall their earlier learning and to understand what was now expected of them. The structure of the medieval church was explained, and illustrated very clearly by a PowerPoint presentation. This provided a very clear focus for the lesson. Very clear guidance and well-targeted support by both the teacher and two technicians helped students speedily to download the key points of the presentation onto their tablets. This provided a worksheet which posed key questions for their independent research. Students were thoroughly engrossed and worked at a very demanding level, constantly challenged by the teacher to be accurate in their analysis of historical sources. They made rapid progress, using their very good ICT skills to work at full stretch in completing the worksheet. Throughout the lesson the focus was on the development of historical knowledge, understanding and skills. The tablet PCs were a valuable resource in sustaining a very good pace of learning and very high levels of concentration.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high in Year 9 and at GCSE.
- ICT is used very well to support teaching and learning.
- Teaching methods are effective in developing independent learning.
- Formal assignments are assessed thoroughly but other work is not assessed consistently enough.
- The department is developing modules of work relating geography to industry and commerce.

Commentary

94. GCSE results are very high and very consistent. Typically almost two-thirds of students gain A* or A grades and almost all gain at least a B grade. Students do better in geography than in many of their other subjects.
95. In work seen, students attain very high standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Their achievement in relation to their attainment on entry is very good in Years 7 to 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Almost all students across the ability range reach their full potential. By Year 9, students develop a very good knowledge and understanding of physical and human geography. Year 7 students, for example, understand the relationships between different types of rock and the shape of the landscape; higher attainers link this to the economic activity in the locality. In Years 10 and 11, students deepen their ability to understand and explain the links between different aspects of geography. Year 10 students, for example, have a thorough knowledge of land reclamation and can compare the social, environmental and economic costs and benefits. Year 11 students' understanding of ecosystems goes beyond that required for GCSE.
96. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are able and experienced teachers who effectively encourage students to work at or near their capacity. They have very good subject knowledge and use this to give very clear explanations, often at a level of sophistication that is above the norm for the year group. Assignments are challenging, often engaging students in independent research using printed or electronic resources. Students' ICT skills are developed through this research and by using computers or tablet PCs to present their work. Teachers give very good guidance on examination technique. Students' learning is enhanced by their enthusiasm and commitment in lessons and the high quality of their written work. Their formal assignments are assessed very thoroughly, giving

both students and teachers the opportunity to evaluate their progress against their targets. However, the assessment of other classwork and homework is not carried out by all teachers to a consistently high standard.

97. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has a clear understanding of how to organise the work of the department so as to achieve consistently high results. Teachers are innovative and are at the forefront of the use of ICT in teaching and learning. They are always eager to develop strategies to improve teaching and learning. The department is planning to adapt its work to reflect the school's new business and enterprise status. A varied programme of fieldwork gives each year group the opportunity to learn geography in a real context. The department is well resourced with computers; other resources are adequate though not abundant. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen in all stages and weaknesses identified in the last report have been addressed.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good but in a few lessons it does not provide enough challenge.
- Marking is thorough but assessment data is not used well enough to track students' progress.
- The department is very well led and managed, but lesson observation is not being used systematically enough to ensure consistency in teaching.

Commentary

98. GCSE results have been consistently very high for the last three years, with almost two out of three students gaining A* or A grades. Students generally do better in history than in their other subjects. For current students, standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve very well.
99. Students have very good historical knowledge, understanding and skills. In lessons they show an exceptional understanding of the impact of key personalities and events, which they link and discuss knowledgeably. Year 10 students, for instance, engaged in a lively and perceptive discussion of the impact of Lenin's economic policies, drawing confidently on their wide knowledge to explain and predict events. Written work is of very high quality and extended writing is developed very well from Year 7 onwards. Essays are very well structured, analytical and fluent. GCSE coursework is very well researched: students make critical use of historical sources, evaluate the evidence to link causal factors and make perceptive judgements which they explain clearly. Students work well independently and make very good use of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
100. Students relish the teachers' challenge and very high expectations. They are very interested and keen to explore issues in detail. Teachers' clear, authoritative presentations drawing on very good subject knowledge enable students to make rapid progress in understanding complex issues. Probing questioning extends and deepens students' thinking. Year 11 students for instance, were challenged to be very accurate in their evaluation of the extent to which attitudes and relationships changed during the Stalinisation of Russia and its satellites. Students work at full stretch individually and in groups, spurred on by well-judged intervention. Individual thinking and independent study are strongly encouraged. In a few lessons, however, the pace of learning is slower: the teaching is sound, but there is not enough challenge. Work is marked regularly and most marking provides good guidance for improvement, though this is not always so. Assessment data is not used systematically to track students' progress.

101. The very high standards and continuing trend of improvement reflect very good leadership and management. The newly-appointed head of department has a very clear vision and gives a clear lead. The department shares a strong commitment to the achievement of excellence. Innovative approaches to curriculum planning enhance students' enjoyment of history. Practice is kept under constant review, but lesson observation is not sufficiently well linked to action planning to raise all teaching to the standard of the best. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection in improving standards and the quality of teaching.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very high.
- Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well.
- Religious education makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual development.
- The subject has made significant progress in all areas since the last inspection.
- Students sometimes lack self confidence in discussion and debate.
- Teachers make very good use of new technology to support independent learning.

Commentary

102. All students take a GCSE full or short course in religious education. Results in both courses are very high in relation to national averages. In the short course in 2003, two-thirds of students gained A or A* grades. Results in the full course, taken by a small group of students, were not quite so high, but students did as well as in their other subjects.
103. For current students, standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and students are achieving very well at both stages. A small group of Year 10 students have begun to study AS-level religious education. Their standards are above average for the course and they are achieving very well. By Year 9, students have very good knowledge and understanding of the key beliefs and practices of Christianity and other world faiths and appreciate the ways in which these affect daily life. They use specialist vocabulary with growing confidence. All students move beyond the externals of religion to probe deeper questions of meaning and morality and most have developed a high degree of empathy and reflection. In each year group there are examples of accurate and sensitive writing. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. In Years 10 and 11, students build further on their existing skills and knowledge. They form their own ideas on a wide range of ethical and religious issues and apply their understanding to topical situations. They respond very well to difficult challenges such as thinking through the concepts of omnipotence or transcendence and express themselves very well in writing. Students of all years, however, sometimes lack self-confidence in discussion and debate.
104. Teaching and learning are very good, and are significantly improved since the last inspection. Teaching has a very positive impact on students' attitudes and their learning. Enthusiasm and humour are present in all lessons and intellectual demands are high. As a result, students enjoy their lessons and rise to the challenges. Clear exposition, coupled with judicious questioning and prompting, makes students think beyond the obvious. A significant strength of the teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is the clear emphasis on examination requirements – students are therefore very well equipped to write consistently high-standard answers. Teachers make very good use of technology and support students in learning independently. In Year 7, for example, students have access to tablet PCs which they use to research topics and organise their work, both in the classroom and at home.
105. Leadership and management are both very good. There is a clarity of vision and a shared commitment to improve. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. The

subject makes a significant contribution to students' personal development, and an excellent contribution to their spiritual development.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high.
- ICT is used regularly and well in all courses.
- Students from Year 7 upwards are very capable in learning independently.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 do not all take a course in design and technology.
- In a few lessons, the highest-attaining students are insufficiently challenged.

Commentary

106. GCSE results in 2002 were very high compared to national averages. Students made better progress than girls in other Kent grammar schools. Results were similar in 2003 and students did rather better than in their other subjects.
107. When they join the school in Year 7, students' attainment in design and technology is average. They achieve well during Years 7 to 9 and by the end of Year 9 standards are above average. Students respond well to the challenges they are set and enjoy working independently. They learn to use a wide range of materials and tools with accuracy. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Students' GCSE project work is particularly strong. They are confident in the skills required in designing, communicating their ideas and making high quality products. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, as is behaviour in workshops. Students settle quickly and sustain concentration well throughout the lesson.
108. Teaching and learning are very good at all stages. In a few lessons it is excellent. In most lessons, teachers' expectations are very high and students are encouraged to work with a high level of independence. In some practical lessons, however, opportunities are missed to draw the class together to review progress and extend students' understanding of the concepts underlying their work. Students are very willing to experiment and respond well to the advice they are given. In a few lessons, however, the most able students are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers have good expertise in the industrial context of the topics they teach and in examination requirements. Students' work is assessed thoroughly and teachers are consistent in the standards they expect. As a result, students know their targets, how well they are doing and what they need to improve.
109. The curriculum is good, except that severe limitations in the accommodation prevent the school from ensuring that all students in Years 10 and 11 take a course in design and technology. All those who choose to follow a GCSE course are enabled to do so. The content of the curriculum is broad and balanced. Students typically design and make product packaging, fashion wear and household items. They all learn computer-aided design. The accommodation is cramped. The main teaching areas retain the appearance of workshops rather than contemporary design studios and as such fail to provide a stimulating environment.
110. Leadership and management are very good. The departmental plan contains appropriate priorities to ensure that standards continue to rise. Teachers work well together and are given very good support in planning their work and ensuring that assessment is done accurately. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. The balance of the curriculum has been

improved, with better attention paid to design modelling. Standards have risen and the level of resources has been improved.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

111. Art and design and music were inspected in detail, but drama was also sampled. GCSE results in drama were very high in 2002 and even higher in 2003, when almost nine out of ten students gained A* or A grades. The course is popular and in a Year 11 lesson students' performance of 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' revealed a high standard of technical knowledge and performance. The acting was accomplished and subtle in creating contrasting mood changes. Students' attitudes were excellent in the independence of their organisation and their support for each other. In a Year 10 lesson, very good teaching enabled students to make very good progress in understanding the characters in Potter's 'Blue Remembered Hills'. In Years 7 to 9, teachers from the English department provide students with a good foundation and effectively develop their understanding of dramatic techniques and conventions. The contribution of drama to the life of the school is excellent. There is a wide range of performances, some of which are directed by sixth form students. Outstanding links with local and national theatres and theatre groups enrich the students' learning and experiences.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Achievement is excellent in Year 10.
- In their sketchbooks, students explore visual ideas creatively and annotate their work very well.
- Students have very positive attitudes which contribute significantly to their achievement.
- Lessons are too short for GCSE students to develop their work fully.
- The department lacks computer facilities.

Commentary

112. GCSE results in 2002 were very high, with almost all students gaining A* or A grades and four out of ten gaining A*. Results declined in 2003, though they remained well above average. There were no A* grades but seven out of ten students gained grade A. Students did less well than in their other subjects. The fall in results was largely because the department had staffing difficulties during the year and some teaching was done by non-specialist or unqualified teachers. The difficulties have now been resolved and the department is again staffed by permanent specialist teachers.
113. When students join the school in Year 7, their understanding and skills in art are average. They have, however, very good literacy and spatial awareness and excellent motivation. These factors, combined with very good teaching, lead to very good achievement and to standards that are well above average by Year 9. Students are especially good at drawing and using dry colour media. They research visual and written ideas very effectively and combine these creatively in their sketchbooks. As their work progresses, they make reflective annotations and evaluate their work very well. Mark-making using water-based paints is relatively weaker. Standards in this and in three-dimensional work are broadly average.
114. Most students in Year 11 did not make the progress they could have done in Year 10. However, their progress is now rapid and if the lack of confidence some have developed can be overcome, they have the ability and commitment to catch up this year. Inspection findings indicate that standards will be well above average by the end of the year and that achievement will be very good. In Year 10, students' achievement is excellent. They have made outstanding

progress in their first project, painting in acrylics on canvas. Their work has been supported by resources supplied by the local police headquarters, by whom the paintings have been commissioned for exhibition.

115. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are committed to raising standards. Expectations are very high now. Lessons are very well structured and students receive good advice about how to improve their work. The 50-minute lessons are too short for older students to develop the depth of work of which they are capable. Teachers use the time well, but there are not enough regular opportunities for students to talk about their learning.
116. The head of department is fairly new and has a clear understanding of the department's priorities, but developments have until recently been slowed by the need to deal with more immediate staffing problems. Management is satisfactory, with the potential to improve significantly now the department has stabilised. Resources are unsatisfactory because there are no computers for students to use in their artwork. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall, though improvement in the resources is inadequate.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' musical expertise is used well and has a significant impact on standards.
- There is very good provision for developing students' performing skills.
- The department is aware of the need to develop further assessment procedures for students in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

117. GCSE results were very high in 2002 and 2003. Students did as well as in their other subjects and at least half of them gained A or A* grades.
118. For current students, standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Students enter the school with average musical abilities and achieve very well. By Year 9, many show good rhythmic and vocal skills. They easily locate notes on the keyboard and most can play a simple melody fluently. Students understand basic chord structures and use these well in twelve bar blues compositions. Although students understand important musical terms, they do not always use these when answering questions. Students enjoy lessons, develop confidence as performers and work well together in groups. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students. More musically able students make excellent progress, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
119. Standards by the end of Year 11 are very high. Students achieve very well and have a committed approach to their studies. They show a very good musical understanding and have well-developed performing and composing skills. They use music technology confidently to devise and refine their compositions. More musically able students make excellent progress in all aspects of the course.
120. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their own skills well to aid students' learning. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher sang short phrases which students then repeated. This led them to develop their aural skills and become more confident in singing in front of each other. Teachers set challenging tasks which involve students in a range of musical experiences. In Year 11, for example, students listened to an unaccompanied vocal piece by Meredith Monk. Working in groups they then composed their own piece in the same style. As a result, they understood the effects produced by combining different vocal sounds

and gained a clearer insight into Monk's experimental techniques. There is good provision for developing students' literacy and mathematical skills and for students to use music technology.

121. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has clear objectives that focus on raising students' achievement. Assessment procedures are being extended in Years 7 to 9 in order to give more specific guidance to students about their progress. Over 350 students receive instrumental lessons from peripatetic staff. These teachers make a valuable contribution to the work of the department. Opportunity is provided for students to take part in concerts, both in and out of school. Eight students perform in county groups. The accommodation is excellent and resources are very good.
122. Improvement since the last inspection is good. High standards have been maintained in Year 9, and standards have risen in Year 11. The quality of teaching has improved and is now consistently very good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the GCSE course are consistently very high.
- Standards in games and gymnastics are above average.
- Extra-curricular provision in sport is very good.
- The range of activities available in Years 10 and 11 should be extended.
- Standards in dance are lower than in other activities.

Commentary

123. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Attainment on entry to the school is average and students achieve very well. Their skills in games are a strength. They understand tactics and apply them effectively and have very good ball skills. In gymnastics they construct sequences with a partner that show good body tension, control and a high level of trust. They are able to evaluate each other's performance but are not confident in using technical vocabulary in their feedback. Standards in dance in Year 7 are below average, though students achieve well as they have had very little previous experience.
124. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and students achieve well. They have advanced tactics in netball and have very good balance and control both on and off the ball. In gymnastics, their skills progress and they perform with control and imagination. Dance is an area for development as students are not confident in expressing themselves through movement. Students respond positively to the high level of challenge and most practise hard to improve their skills. Students with special educational needs are often talented games players and achieve well. Those with physical disabilities achieve well because tasks are adapted to meet their needs. Their success adds to their self esteem.
125. Some students opt to take a GCSE in physical education. Standards are very high and students' achievement is very good. In recent years, nine out of ten students have gained A or A* grades, performing significantly better than in their other subjects. Students have an exceptional depth of knowledge that is often well beyond course requirements. They have a very good grasp of technical vocabulary. All students are challenged at their own level with the highest-attaining extended through independent research. Practical standards are also very high.

126. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations of students' work and sporting attitudes. Lessons have clear objectives and a brisk pace. In practical lessons teachers and students give effective demonstrations. Teachers plan well and mostly ensure that the needs of all students are met. Literacy skills are supported well but the development of numeracy is not as effective. Good use is made of digital photography and video to evaluate students' performance. Expertise in the teaching of dance is not as strong as in other activities, resulting in slower learning. Teaching is very good in the examination course: teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements and extend students intellectually and physically. Feedback for GCSE students is good but does not give them specific advice on how to reach their target grades.
127. A popular extra-curricular programme provides students with a very good range of activities. Individuals and teams enjoy success at school, county, district and national levels in activities such as netball, hockey and athletics.
128. Leadership and management are good. There is very good teamwork and commitment, which results in a challenging and caring environment. The development plan is sharply focused on improving standards and reviewing the curriculum, which is at present rather conventional and limited in the range of activities. Monitoring of teaching has successfully highlighted areas for development but has not yet ensured consistency in the quality of teaching. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. High standards have been maintained and GCSE results have improved. The changing rooms still remain an issue as they are too cramped to accommodate more than two classes at a time.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have settled into this new applied GCSE course well and are achieving very well.
- Standards in Year 11 are very high.
- Teaching overall is very good and challenges students to think for themselves.
- Leadership is excellent.
- There is no model business room to enhance understanding of business practices.

Commentary

129. The current Year 11 will be the first students to be examined in this applied business GCSE course. Standards in Year 11 are very high compared with the national average. Students have adapted very well to the style of learning required by the course and are achieving very well in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. They show a very clear understanding of business ideas and processes, such as business finance and planning. They understand the nature and purpose of accounting systems, including balance sheets and profit and loss accounts. Notes are very carefully written and most students communicate confidently and accurately.
130. Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent. The characteristics of the best teaching are detailed planning, rigorous pace, high expectations and a high level of challenge. Students respond very well and make very good and sometimes excellent progress. Interesting and varied methods are used to promote learning. In one excellent lesson on recruitment, for example, students had previously completed a real business application form and were shortlisting in groups, in preparation for interviews in a future lesson. They made excellent gains in their understanding of business procedures as well as in their ability to work in teams and make decisions. In a small proportion of less effective lessons the pace is less rigorous and

students do not make as much progress. In all lessons teachers' expert subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to their explanations. When stimulated by enthusiastic and engaging approaches, students are extremely positive and very keen to participate.

131. Leadership is excellent, with an extremely clear vision for the development of the subject. There are plans to introduce an AVCE course, in addition to AS and A2, to provide good continuity from Year 11 into the sixth form. The department is very well managed and has developed very effective teaching and learning methods. Teachers are dedicated to achieving the highest possible standards. The accommodation does not provide students with a model business environment to give them realistic experience of business organisation and systems. More opportunities to meet and listen to visitors from business would also be beneficial in widening the curriculum.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

132. Citizenship was inspected in full and is reported below. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) was sampled. The school has introduced new arrangements for the delivery of PSHE. Most of the topics will be covered in focus days, though some are taught within citizenship, religious education or science. There is a new coordinator, who has constructed a sound plan that ensures all essential areas are covered. Some lessons during a Year 7 focus day on health education were observed. The day was effective in increasing students' knowledge and awareness of health and personal safety, and included valuable contributions from visiting specialists. Students gained practical experience of first aid and discussed how to manage stress. They received good advice about changes during puberty and enjoyed an entertaining talk on personal safety from a community policeman. The new arrangements for PSHE are satisfactory, though it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. The provision will be reviewed at the end of the year, with inputs from staff and students.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Citizenship is treated as a full National Curriculum subject and staffed by specialist teachers.
- Lessons have a positive impact on students' personal development and skills.
- There are good opportunities for participation and responsible action through voluntary community work.
- Subject policies require further development, especially assessment in Years 7 and 8.
- The contribution of other subjects and extra-curricular activities to citizenship is yet to be audited.

Commentary

133. In Years 7 and 8, students are learning new skills such as listening, communication, and persuasion. Their achievement is good and standards are slightly above average. In Years 9 and 10, students are preparing for the GCSE course, which they will take at the end of Year 10. In these years, standards are above average and students' achievement is good.
134. Students in Years 7 and 8 show a good knowledge and understanding of one of the main areas of study in relation to the rights, responsibilities and duties of a citizen. Enquiry and communication skills are developing well so that students of all abilities contribute to discussion and form their own opinions about key issues. In Years 9 and 10, students use their increased powers of verbal expression effectively in debate and discussion on global issues such as the roots of conflict.

135. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Year 10. They are better in Year 10 because students have become accustomed to the unique demands made by this subject and respond with enthusiasm to the tasks that are set. Teachers use a wide variety of methods to ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills that are required to become effective citizens. In Year 7, for example, students wrote short stories using words of non-English origin to illustrate the contribution of other cultures to our language. In a Year 10 lesson, a lively debate developed as students played out the inequities of world trade.
136. Leadership and management are good. The teachers are enthusiastic about the important role of citizenship in the curriculum and imaginative in planning new ways of teaching. The development plan is thorough and contains appropriate priorities to ensure that citizenship is fully embedded in the curriculum. However, the contribution that other subjects make to students' understanding of citizenship has not yet been identified or coordinated.
137. Each year group will spend one focus day per year on citizenship activities. The programme includes some exciting ideas and has the potential for students to explore topics in depth. One proposal, for example, is to develop a citizenship forum by linking with other schools via the internet. The school has a well-established programme of voluntary community work locally and internationally which provides all students with opportunities for participation and responsible action.
138. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Citizenship has been given full status as an independent subject and there has been a significant improvement in the attention given to Britain as a multi-cultural society.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, thirteen subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	85.7	90.0	71.4	42.7	44.3	39.0
Business studies	5	100.0	89.1	20.0	31.7	38.0	35.4
Chemistry	7	100.0	84.8	14.3	36.9	31.4	35.2
Media studies	7	100.0	94.2	100.0	36.1	52.9	38.5
English literature	5	100.0	94.4	40.0	37.9	48.0	38.9
Design and technology	12	100.0	89.2	41.7	32.0	44.2	35.7
General studies	5	100.0	78.6	0.0	25.7	34.1	30.0
History	5	80.0	91.8	40.0	37.2	32.0	37.8
Information technology	13	92.3	78.2	38.5	20.6	39.2	28.5
Mathematics	28	67.9	74.2	14.3	34.3	24.6	31.3
Psychology	7	100.0	83.2	28.6	32.5	37.1	33.6
Religious studies	21	95.2	90.9	38.1	38.9	40.5	37.9

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	9	100.0	96.1	100.0	48.7	113.3	85.1
Biology	22	100.0	91.6	50.0	36.3	87.3	74.1
Business studies	25	100.0	96.4	80.0	32.8	99.2	76.5
Chemistry	12	100.0	94.0	41.7	45.9	86.7	81.1
Media studies	23	100.0	98.3	56.5	36.8	91.3	81.1
Drama	20	100.0	98.1	60.0	41.5	93.0	82.9
English	11	100.0	98.3	36.4	36.5	85.5	80.1
English literature	31	100.0	98.5	61.3	43.7	96.8	84.3
French	6	100.0	96.2	66.7	46.1	103.3	83.0
Design and technology	11	100.0	95.3	72.7	35.5	105.5	76.5
General studies	120	100.0	90.1	41.7	29.1	86.3	69.3

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Geography	17	100.0	97.1	82.4	40.5	104.7	80.9
History	34	100.0	97.1	41.2	41.0	87.6	81.2
Information technology	16	100.0	89.1	0.0	22.4	57.5	64.1
Mathematics	22	100.0	93.3	36.4	52.2	80.9	84.7
Music	8	100.0	97.7	0.0	41.8	62.5	82.2
Psychology	25	100.0	94.3	64.0	38.9	96.0	77.7
Physics	20	100.0	92.8	20.0	42.8	72.0	78.6
Religious studies	10	100.0	96.3	60.0	44.0	94.0	82.2
Spanish	5	100.0	96.2	100.0	47.3	100.0	83.6
Sports studies	12	100.0	95.4	83.3	29.5	108.3	73.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

139. English literature and French were the focus but English language and literature, German and Spanish were also sampled. Results in English language and literature have been above average but declined in 2003, though students' progress from GCSE was as expected. One Year 12 lesson was observed which was very good. Students presented to the rest of the class their analyses of different aspects of texts, including the social context and the linguistic structure. The teacher set high expectations for the precise use of language and skilfully drew out learning points from the discussion. Students used technical language with assurance and accuracy.
140. Few students have taken A-level German in recent years, though there was a small entry in 2003. Results were average and students achieved as expected. One lesson was observed which was excellent. Students conversed naturally in German about their experiences in the country and showed independence in extending their knowledge. The teacher skilfully facilitated the conversations and ensured that all were extended at their own level.
141. A-level results in Spanish have been well above average, though they declined a little in 2003, when students' progress from GCSE was a little better than expected. One lesson was observed which was very good. Students followed a very effective presentation in Spanish about the grammar of the language and contributed ideas spontaneously, showing a good understanding of the material.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results have improved considerably in recent years.
- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- The course is popular and most students successfully complete the course.
- Students are motivated and energised by very good teaching.
- Leadership, management and teamwork are all very good.
- Some students need to develop more secure examination writing skills.

Commentary

142. A-level results were well above average in 2002 and similar in 2003. Results have improved steadily and quickly since 2000. AS-level results were very high in 2002 but were lower in 2003 because marks on one module were significantly below those in the other two. The school is challenging the results as they do not reflect students' standards in their other work. However, some students' technique in examination writing was not as assured as it needed to be.
143. Standards in Year 13 are well above average, with many students working at the very highest grades. Most students' writing is consistently evaluative and analytical. Students have a detailed knowledge of the themes and narrative structure of texts. They evaluate the contemporary values that influence authors and comment perceptively on how interpretations of texts change over time. Most write accurately and persuasively. Their writing reflects the relish and independence with which they approach their lessons. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students exchanged strongly argued views on the forces that impel Iago. Others confidently analysed Laurie Lee's lyricism to evaluate his recollections of childhood, provoking rigorous text analysis and challenge from their peers. The written work of lower-attaining students shows some flaws in expression and accuracy and their analysis of the author's use of language lacks detail. In Year 12, students make very good progress in developing analytical skills in lessons but are not yet consistently transferring these skills to their written work.
144. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are very experienced and are well read in terms of both texts and critics. As a result, students make very good progress in improving their analysis and their argumentative writing. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons. Learning is highly interactive, with many opportunities for whole class and group discussion. Students are expected to work independently through researching contextual background and delivering presentations, as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. The variety of learning activities encourages and motivates students. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Marking is very good. Teachers use written and spoken comments to clarify what each student needs to do to improve.
145. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers monitor students' progress very closely. Target setting is effective although Year 12 students do not receive their targets as early as they could. The sharing of assessment objectives clarifies for students what they have to improve to achieve their goals. Teachers have high aspirations for their students. Their enthusiasm for literature is outstanding and provides an excellent example. The courses are very popular and the completion rate is high. Thoughtful leadership is apparent in the innovative rotation of 'lecture' lessons that provide students with very good preparation for the challenging synoptic paper. The quality of provision is monitored well and improvement has been very good since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

146. Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are well above average in all sixth form subjects. In physical education, for example, students use technical vocabulary accurately and appropriately. Their general expression is clear: they never lapse into inappropriate colloquialism. Research skills are also well above average.
147. Teachers provide very good support for students' communication skills. Many subjects expect students to give presentations, often using multi-media. In mathematics, high expectations are set for reasoned arguments and explanations. Business education provides many opportunities for debate and discussion. Only in health and social care is the enhancement of communication less effective: guidance for giving presentations is not as strong as in other subjects and students are not regularly expected to communicate their findings and understanding.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are strongly motivated and standards are well above average.
- Teachers use French throughout all lessons but students do not yet use it spontaneously.
- There are very good enrichment opportunities outside lessons.
- Language teachers are innovative and have very good plans for future development.

Commentary

148. A-level results were well above average in 2001 and 2002. The results in 2003 were similar and most students' progress from GCSE was better than expected.
149. For current students, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above average and students achieve very well. They have confidence in their teachers and this builds their confidence in their own ability. They approach the work in a mature and thoughtful way. Some gifted students achieve particularly well because of the very positive ethos and the opportunities offered by the smaller group sizes in the sixth form. Boys are integrated successfully and achieve as well as the girls.
150. Teaching is very good. Students learn very well because they like the varied approach and the fact that they are treated respectfully. They know that staff are always ready to help, though they are encouraged to become independent. The range of topics is relevant and interesting and they appreciate the chance of contacts with young French people, as well as the extensive opportunities to experience French culture through the media and the internet. They have good access to computers. Assessment is very good: teachers keep track of students' progress and keep them informed about how well they are doing in comparison with their targets. Teachers conduct all lessons in French but, while students make an effort to respond appropriately and initiate conversations, they do not yet do this naturally and spontaneously.
151. Leadership is very good. Staff and students subscribe to a vision of high achievement and a drive towards widening opportunities and raising attainment still further. Management of the course is very effective and appropriate priorities have been identified to improve performance further. Teachers seek the views of students and act on them. Enrichment activities are very strong, including school-based activities such as the film club and an increasing number of foreign trips such as exchanges and work experience in French-speaking countries. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last very positive inspection when standards were reported as well above average.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- The department offers excellent academic support.
- Good teaching engages students and promotes independent learning.
- The range and flexibility of courses offered give students choice and help raise attainment.
- Not all teaching is of an equally high standard.
- The take up of new courses has been low.

Commentary

152. A-level results in 2002 and 2003 were in line with the national average but were below average for girls. Students did less well than in their other subjects, but their progress from GCSE was as expected. AS-level results were above average in 2002 and 2003.
153. For current students, standards at the end of Year 13 are above average and their achievement is good. Standards in the very small further mathematics class are well above average. Students in Year 13 have good algebraic skills and a good understanding of proof. They collaborate well to produce accurate results at a sometimes rapid rate, and can apply their mathematical knowledge well. They are articulate in discussions and use ICT well, especially in graphical work.
154. Teaching is good overall. Some is very good but a minority of lessons are less effective. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to conduct productive and interactive presentations – a teaching style preferred by the students. Students are fully involved in class discussions and take full responsibility for the results they derive. These lessons are brisk and support students' independent learning very well. A small proportion of lessons do not raise achievement sufficiently because they lack challenge and students are not sufficiently engaged in thinking out the answers for themselves.
155. Leadership and management are very good. The department provides excellent academic support and guidance. Students highly value the effective induction programme, detailed marking, ready access to mathematics teachers and their own involvement in setting their target grades. Students have a wide choice of courses, influence what is offered, and can repeat modules in Year 13 to improve their previous results. Students' independent learning is promoted well in lessons and in focus days, where they have to work together to plan and present a lecture. They are also encouraged to exercise responsibility by supporting younger students with their mathematics during lunch hour. The department planned a GCSE statistics course for Year 12 students but there was insufficient demand to run it. There is also a low take up of A-level further mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

156. Mathematics and numeracy are supported and used very well in other subjects. Key skills in numeracy are identified in subjects' schemes of work and are taught well. In economics, for example, students competently use simulation exercises and analyse government statistics. They handle statistics on population and growth in German. In geography and psychology, they are effectively taught how to use statistical tests to interpret the significance of their results.

SCIENCE

157. The focus was on chemistry but biology and physics were also sampled. A-level results in biology were above average for girls in 2003 and have been well above this for the past five years. Physics results have been at or around the national average in recent years. Students' progress from GCSE has been as expected in both sciences. Two lessons were observed which were good. The teachers used their very good subject knowledge to enable students to recall complex terminology and apply it accurately. Students were motivated and made good progress but they were not given enough encouragement to learn independently.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good** and improving.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well organised and planned and taught by enthusiastic subject specialists.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is at least good and often very good.
- Students know their target grades but some are not clear how their day-to-day achievements match this or what they need to do to improve.
- Students' capacity to work independently is underused.

Commentary

158. A-level results in 2002 were above average. In 2003 they were lower – about average overall but below the average for girls. Students' progress from GCSE was slightly below what was expected. Results have fluctuated over recent years.
159. For current students, standards are above average in Year 12 and Year 13. Year 13 students are achieving in line with their predicted grades, although for some their performance in AS modules was below this, because there were not enough permanent specialist teachers last year. The situation has now been remedied and additional teaching sessions have been organised. In lessons seen, students were doing well because the brisk pace of the lessons focused their learning. The more able, articulate students could compare different kinds of evidence and deduce the most useful model for explaining the properties of benzene and the limitations of models. Year 12 students are achieving well, particularly in developing practical skills. In one lesson, students drew well on their very good practical skills and their knowledge to plan an experiment to measure the enthalpy of combustion of ethanol.
160. Teaching and learning are good and often very good. Lessons are very well planned and multi-media presentations are used very successfully to engage students in whole class teaching. Questioning is used well to encourage students to explain their own understanding. Some quieter students, however, are not as actively involved in class discussions and teachers need to ensure that they meet the needs of all students. Students make good use of ICT to present their work, although there is little use of ICT to support graphical work. There are few opportunities for independent study beyond the directed practical work. In the teaching of industrial chemistry, however, each student was given an aspect to research and present to the rest of the class. This provided an excellent opportunity for students to extend their knowledge and improve their research skills.
161. Marking is thorough with useful diagnostic comments. Students know their target grades but some, particularly those in Year 12, are unsure about how their day-to-day work matches expectations or what they need to do to improve. Students are encouraged to use the online tests of the examination boards. This is a very useful in helping students to assess their own progress and identify areas needing improvement.
162. The curriculum is very well organised and the work of the three teachers is coordinated well. Students' progress is tracked carefully in relation to their target grades. The development plan identifies appropriate priorities but the means of evaluating progress need to be specified more clearly.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT is offered through two courses in the sixth form: GCE and AVCE (a vocational A-level course). Both courses were inspected.

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and are rising rapidly.
- Students' attitudes are excellent: they work very hard and achieve well.
- Work is set in a business context and this is highly motivating.
- Students learn with a high degree of independence.
- Students need more frequent guidance on how to reach their targets during coursework.

Commentary

163. A-level results in 2002 were below average and students did less well than in their other subjects. In 2003, the results improved significantly and were above the 2002 national average; in relation to their GCSE results students achieved as expected. The improvement was due to better teaching, better course planning and comprehensive examination preparation. Standards in 2003 AS-level AVCE were well above the national average for 2002 and students made better progress than expected.
164. For current students, standards are well above average and are improving because of challenging work set in a business context. Students begin their A-level course with above average GCSE results and their achievement is good. All students have a very good understanding of the advanced features of spreadsheets such as lookup tables, drop down lists and the IF function. They accurately insert automated buttons to allow easy movement between pages on their spreadsheets. Their recall of some basic spreadsheet features, however, such as absolute cell referencing, is not always sound. Students also have a very good grasp of databases and design their databases very carefully to meet the needs of the client. Data collection forms and the processes to analyse and report data are usually of a professional standard. Students use many higher skills in their databases, including calculations, startup and switchboard pages, with programmed links to tasks. They test their databases thoroughly to ensure they are stable. Their evaluations of their own work are very comprehensive but often report difficulties inserting passwords and completing a user manual.
165. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to focus learning on the essential concepts. They are enthusiastic about their subject, which inspires students' interest. Students are extremely positive towards their learning and work very hard. They are encouraged to learn independently and use the teacher as a learning resource. However lessons do not include enough time for students to clarify and modify their ideas in group discussions.
166. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers have implemented a series of improvements that have led to a rapid rise in standards. The new vocational A-level is successful in meeting the needs of students who want a practical approach. A very impressive range of resources – many on the internet – are being developed to support students' independent learning. Assessment is good but does not provide sufficient formal feedback on progress towards targets during longer pieces of coursework. ICT was introduced in 2000 and since then improvement has been very good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

167. Students use computers very well in many subjects for word processing and communication. They use email to communicate with staff and students and do extensive research on the internet. They make regular use of PowerPoint in presenting their work to the rest of the class. Students have ready access to computers for private study and many students benefit from the very good resources that are posted on the school's intranet, including schemes of work, tests and model answers. There are fewer opportunities for them to use spreadsheets and databases in their studies.

HUMANITIES

168. The focus was on history and religious education but geography, sociology, psychology and politics were also sampled.
169. In geography, A-level results have been consistently very high in relation to the national average. In 2003, most students made better progress than expected from their GCSE results. Two lessons were observed: one was satisfactory and one good. In the good lesson, Year 12 students used computers to prepare AS-level coursework on their fieldwork in Wales. The teacher provided helpful individual guidance on how to improve their work to meet the examination criteria.
170. Results in sociology have been well above average, though they declined a little in 2003, when students achieved as expected. One lesson was seen, in which teaching was good. Students were fully engaged in discussing the roles of women as portrayed in the media. Teaching was accurate and clear but missed some opportunities to extend students' understanding through more probing questions.
171. Psychology results at A-level are consistently well above average and students do significantly better than expected from their GCSE results. Two good lessons were observed. Teaching was lively and knowledgeable; students were very interested and prepared to think for themselves. In one lesson, students learned how to apply statistical tests to psychological data and were given clear guidance on how to select the appropriate test for a particular situation.
172. A-level politics was taken for the first time in 2003. Results were above average and students did better than expected. Two lessons were observed: one was good and the other very good. In the very good lesson, students gave presentations on recent American presidencies and compared these with the role of the British Prime Minister. Expectations of independent research were high and the teacher skilfully led the discussion to highlight issues for further exploration.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and have risen significantly over the last five years.
- Students achieve very well. They are very well motivated and enjoy history.
- Teaching is very good. Much is of an exceptionally high quality but in a few lessons it does not provide sufficient depth of learning.
- Leadership and management are very good but lesson observation is not used systematically enough to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching.

Commentary

173. A-level results in 2002 were above average. They were similar in 2003, and students made better progress than expected from their GCSE results. Results have improved steadily and significantly over the last five years.
174. Standards are continuing to improve and for current students they are well above average. Students' work is often impressive. They develop a wide historical knowledge and a very mature grasp of the issues that they discuss. Class discussions involve all students and reach a high level of debate, often anticipating the next stage of learning. Year 12 students, for example, sustained a stimulating dialogue, questioning the ways in which problems facing agriculture were addressed in America at the time of the New Deal. Students' written work is of very high quality. In making notes they digest and synthesise information well. In planning their

essays, they select appropriate evidence and evaluate it to formulate judgements. Their writing is analytical and fluent, and often sustains an authoritative argument.

175. Nearly all of the teaching is characterised by a very high challenge and students respond extremely well. They appreciate teachers' very good subject knowledge and very clear presentations. Lessons are very well planned to provide a clear focus, and students are consistently expected to work at a demanding level as historians. The dialogue in lessons is stimulated by searching questions. Learning is exciting because it asks much of students' response. In Year 13, for example, students were required to produce presentations comparing different views of the Great Reform Act and this resulted in rapid collaborative learning. Classroom relationships are excellent and build students' confidence. Teaching is always sound but in a few lessons it is less inspiring; in some instances muting students' response and making learning more pedestrian. Marking is very thorough and provides very detailed guidance for improvement. Performance data is used well to set students targets and track their progress.
176. The improving standards and high quality teaching are the result of very good leadership and management. The newly-appointed head of department gives a clear and energetic lead for the level of intellectual challenge that is expected. Teachers work well together in order to continue to raise standards. Students are regularly consulted and the provision is kept under constant review. Teaching is monitored systematically but follow-up procedures are not yet effective in ensuring that all teaching is of equally high quality. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection in both standards and the quality of provision. The number of students taking the subject has increased significantly

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are well above average.
- Teaching is enthusiastic and knowledgeable and motivates students to learn very successfully.
- Students cope very well with high levels of intellectual challenge.
- A few lessons are taught during lunch time and some students do not therefore get an adequate rest break.

Commentary

177. A-level results were well above average in 2002 and were similar in 2003. Almost all students did better than would be expected from their GCSE results. AS and A2 courses are proving increasingly popular and numbers in the current Years 12 and 13 have increased considerably.
178. Current standards are also well above average. Students embark on sixth form religious education courses with a wide range of previous attainment and the majority achieve very well. Students of all abilities are encouraged and supported very well. They build effectively on the knowledge they gained at GCSE and respond very well to the increased challenge of using original sources of information and the increasingly complex ideas.
179. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers combine high quality support with very good opportunities for students to develop independence in their research and their opinions. Students respond with very good concentration and a maturity of understanding. Some teaching is excellent in its intellectual challenge and the sophistication of students' response. Teachers provide very clear guidance on what students need to do to give high quality answers in the examination. Marking of students' work is very thorough and informed by very good understanding of examination criteria. Very effective displays of students' work reinforce the learning ethos, including one, for example, that demonstrates how films such as 'The Matrix'

and 'American Beauty' can illustrate philosophical arguments. Other displays stimulate thought by intellectually challenging quotations from philosophers and scholars. Students react to the enthusiastic and lively teaching with very positive attitudes and determination to succeed.

180. Leadership and management are both very good. Teachers are very enthusiastic and work very well together, showing a very good team spirit in sharing ideas and resources. The department succeeds in its aim to promote independent learning within an ethos in which all can succeed. A small proportion of A-level lessons are taught at lunchtime so that some students are not provided with an adequate rest break. In addition to the A-level course, religious education is provided for all sixth form students, which is an improvement since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are well above average.
- Standards have risen significantly over the last four years.
- Much work is set in an industrial context.
- There are good enrichment activities, including visits to Europe.

Commentary

181. A-level results in 2002 were very high in relation to national averages and well above the average for girls. Results were not quite so high in 2003, but were well above the 2002 national average. Almost all students made better progress than would be expected from their GCSE results. Results have improved steadily and rapidly over the past four years.
182. For current students, standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Students join the sixth form with a variety of backgrounds in design and technology. By the end of Year 12, their AS project work demonstrates a clear grasp of the processes of designing and making, and an increasing fluency in communication skills. Students' products include leisure wear, furniture and water sculptures. Their designs and their final products are of a high standard. Year 13 students continue to achieve very well, independently developing their own product briefs with real clients. Ambitious work is tackled with confidence. Students investigate their designs in depth and develop them carefully and thoroughly. Their practical skills are high and the quality of the final products is very professional. Many students go on to study design-related subjects in higher education.
183. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and explain theoretical work clearly and accurately. They are careful to ensure that Year 12 students are all brought up to a good standard in constructional work and the theory of basic materials. Students are encouraged to work independently and are well supported by very good assessment procedures that give them constructive feedback on how to develop their work. A particular strength is that much project work is set in a real industrial context, supported by a very good programme of industrial visits and links. Students also have good experience in analysing and evaluating existing products using internet research, visits to museums such as the Victoria and Albert and visits to manufacturers in Paris and Milan. They have good opportunities to use computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture in two and three dimensions.
184. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers work well together and there are very good procedures to monitor the quality of provision and to track students' progress in relation to their targets. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards,

teaching and the quality of management have all improved significantly. Access to a sixth-form design studio would further enhance provision.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

185. The focus was on art and design and theatre studies but textiles, music and media studies were also sampled. One textiles lesson was observed which was excellent. Inspiring teaching led students to very high levels of motivation and achievement. Students' work was very well informed by industrial applications; through their success they made significant gains in confidence and personal development.
186. Music results have varied but were above average in 2003 and students made better progress than expected from their GCSE results. In a very good Year 13 lesson, students benefited from the teacher's very good subject knowledge in their analysis of a Beethoven score, noting how the composer developed ideas using modulation and repeated small figures.
187. A-level results in media studies were above average in 2001 and 2002. They were about average in 2003 and students' progress from their GCSE results was as expected. Two lessons were seen which were good. In a Year 12 lesson, students learned how advertisers use psychological theories of human needs. Their understanding and motivation was enhanced by using computer software to analyse their own needs, but opportunities were missed to explore the links between different theories.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Previous underachievement is still apparent in students' work but teaching and learning are now good and students are achieving well.
- Students incorporate research very well into their practical experimentation.
- Students' positive attitudes and motivation support their learning.
- Lessons are too short for students to develop their work fully.
- There is a lack of space for students to leave work accessible or to store finished work.
- There are not enough resources, particularly in ICT, for students to develop a wide curriculum range.

Commentary

188. A-level results in 2002 were very high in relation to all schools and well above average for girls. The 2003 results were not so high, but were still above average for girls. Students achieved about as expected from their GCSE results. Students' learning during 2002-3 was affected by staffing difficulties which have now been resolved.
189. For current students, standards are above average. Year 13 students were affected by the problems with staffing and did not make satisfactory progress in Year 12. They are now achieving well, however, with some work showing very good progress from the start of this year. Their practical work is individual and creative. Its quality is enhanced because students do very good, analytical research and incorporate this well into their artwork. Students in Year 12 are practising and improving their technical skills. At the beginning of the year, these were not robust enough to support open-ended creative work. Through structured teaching they are starting to achieve well.
190. The department is now staffed by specialist teachers and teaching is good. Staff and students have taken a positive approach to the need to reverse previous underachievement.

Relationships are very good and students appreciate the good support they receive. Teachers are quick to identify any weaknesses in students' skills and take appropriate action. Students have one-to-one mini-tutorials in lessons which are very helpful in developing their creative ideas and providing constructive assessment of their work.

191. Leadership and management are satisfactory, but there are several other factors that adversely affect achievement. Lessons are too short for students to develop their large scale work. This is particularly so because they have no dedicated studio in which they can leave work out. As a result, they spend too much of their time setting up and packing away. Consumable resources are limited, which restricts the range that students can attempt unless they buy resources themselves. There is a lack of computer hardware, software and peripherals and, as a result, students cannot develop the technological approach to art which will be required in higher education or future careers. The department also lacks storage space for students' large work, which reduces working space in the studios. Most of these issues were raised in the last report and progress towards their resolution has been unsatisfactory.

Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good, with very high expectations of students' work.
- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- The curriculum is very well planned and offers very good enrichment.
- Leadership and teamwork are very good.
- The use of classrooms for some lessons has a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Commentary

192. A-level results in 2002 were well above average. They were very similar in 2003, when almost all students achieved better than expected from their GCSE results.
193. For current students, standards are well above average and students are achieving very well. Year 12 students have a very good knowledge of the texts they study. Their written work is accurate and shows a detailed understanding of concepts and dramatic discourse. In practical work, they collaborate very well and make perceptive evaluations of their own and others' work. In one Year 12 lesson, for example, two students held the class spell-bound by the rowing scene between Harry and Duckling in 'Our Country's Good'. Their performance had an inspirational effect on the rest of the class, who were able to evaluate in detail the strengths in the work. Standards of oral work are very good in Year 12 and even higher in Year 13. Year 13 students show confidence and autonomy. They adapt their presentations to meet the needs of the audience and handle dialogue with sensitivity. Where standards are highest, students take responsibility for the direction and content of their work. They take risks and push themselves to produce sensitive and effective performances. In both years, students respond thoughtfully to teachers' questions and re-think their work in order to improve it.
194. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have an outstanding knowledge of examination requirements and of a wide range of theatre styles. They are responsive and imaginative and establish very good relationships with the students. Lessons are well structured to allow students time to work independently and to reflect on and improve their work. The quality of questioning and the interaction between teachers and students are outstanding. Teachers have very high expectations and regularly refer students to additional resources to extend their learning. Students apply themselves well and make good use of their previous experiences. They are overwhelmingly enthusiastic and eager to contribute. Year 12 students are learning to work independently and Year 13 students do so consistently. In one Year 13 lesson, for example, students were able to devise their own script, staging, direction and effects and then

adapt these in order to raise their work to a very sophisticated level. On the rare occasions when the quality of learning was less than very good or excellent, students were passive, delaying the challenge of working practically.

195. The department is managed very well, with clear direction and very good teamwork. Practice is monitored regularly in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching. There are excellent opportunities for enrichment, through theatre visits and regular school productions, some of which allow students to select, cast and produce their own show. The drama studio provides flexible, well-equipped and purpose-built accommodation, though some lessons take place in classrooms, which is not satisfactory as it affects students' learning. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Examination results were already high but have been further improved; there are now more specialist staff and further improvements in the accommodation are planned.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are consistently above average and many students gain better grades than in their other subjects.
- Teaching is good, and is made more effective by the links made between theoretical ideas and practical activities.
- Students have a wide range of extra-curricular activities and standards are above average.
- There is no programme of recreational sport on offer to all students.

Commentary

196. A-level results were consistently well above average from 1999 to 2002. They were not quite so high in 2003, but were above the 2002 national average. Almost all students made progress that was better than expected from their GCSE results.
197. For current students, standards in Years 12 and 13 are above average and they are achieving well. They have a good knowledge of anatomy and physiology and a good understanding of theories, such as in the psychology of sport. Students joining from other schools who have not had the opportunity to follow a GCSE course in physical education use their general knowledge and technical language well to think logically about theoretical aspects. Students' learning is supported by very good skills in taking notes and good use of ICT, particularly for analysing data and presenting it in graphs and tables. They have good numeracy skills and apply these well to their studies. They all take part in a wide range of activities from horse riding to downhill skiing. Standards reached in extra curricular activities are above average. Many students represent the county and a few represent the country.
198. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are good. Teachers have very good expertise in the subject and lessons are well planned, including tasks to develop students' skills in independent research, oral presentations and note-taking. A greater range of resources, such as local university physiology laboratories, could be used to stimulate further learning. Students' understanding of key concepts is consolidated particularly well because teachers regularly make links between the practical and theoretical aspects of the subject. The quality of students' answers is deepened as a result. Teachers have high expectations of the rate and quality of students' work, and the resulting very good motivation is a major factor in their good achievement. Students enjoy the high level of challenge and are very appreciative of the good support that teachers provide. Extra care needs to be taken, however, to ensure that students who have not taken a GCSE in physical education are supported through the early stages of the

course. All students approach the subject in a very mature manner and many are planning to use the qualification in their future careers. The boys have been well integrated into the course and give an added dimension to discussion and performance.

199. Leadership and management are good. The examination courses are very well organised, ensuring that all modules are covered in depth. Results from examinations and assessment are used effectively to identify aspects in which students perform well and others which could be improved. There are, however, some weaknesses in the provision. There is no programme of recreational activities for all students, though many take advantage of the opportunity to help younger students' in lessons and clubs and to play in teams. In addition, there are no vocational courses, which could help to develop the links with primary schools, as students would gain the qualification through coaching primary school pupils.

BUSINESS

The focus was on business education but economics was also sampled. There have been no recent A-level entries in economics. Two lessons were seen and both were good. In a Year 13 lesson, students understood the role of the Monetary Policy Committee and showed a good awareness of current economic affairs. They were challenged to analyse and interpret economic data presented graphically.

Business education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are consistently very high and students achieve very well.
- Students enjoy the subject and express their views with confidence.
- Leadership is excellent and management very good. Excellent progress is being made in developing enterprise skills.
- Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.
- There are good extra-curricular links with the real world of business but lessons would be enriched by more input from visiting business speakers and visits to firms.

Commentary

200. A-level results in 2002 were very high in relation to the national average and students did better than in their other subjects. The 2003 results were similar. In relation to their GCSE results, students' progress was much better than expected.
201. Standards in the current Year 13 are also very high. This represents very good achievement in relation to students' GCSE results. Students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the central ideas of the subject. They are able to work in teams, think clearly and work independently. They have a very clear understanding of finance and accounting procedures and market planning and budgeting. Standards of oral and written communication are very high. Year 12 students are also achieving very well in understanding financial and ethical aspects of business.
202. Teaching and learning are very good with some excellent practice. Teachers are experts in the subject and have good experience. As a result, their explanations are very clear and discussions are well-informed. Lessons are carefully planned, with varied methods that fully involve students and challenge them to take responsibility for their own learning. Expectations are very high and lessons are taken at a good pace. In the most effective lessons, there is a high level of intellectual rigour and students have frequent opportunities for independent thinking and research. In a Year 13 lesson on marketing strategies, for example, students were very effectively using Ansoff's Matrix to carry out a case study and build their understanding.

Relationships are very good and students are highly motivated, which contributes significantly to the very high standards that are achieved.

203. Leadership is excellent. Staff are dedicated to achieving the highest possible standards and there is an extremely clear vision for the development of the subject. The department is innovative and through very good management has developed very effective teaching methods. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards have risen and there are now many more opportunities for students to explore the world of business through simulations, case studies and extra-curricular links. The curriculum would benefit by introducing visits and inviting specialist speakers into lessons to widen students' awareness of day-to-day business practice.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

Provision in health and social care is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 13 are above average.
- The scientific parts of the course are well taught but teachers' expertise in other aspects is limited.
- Links with other relevant subjects are underdeveloped.
- Assessment is good and students get good feedback in tutorial sessions.
- The department is improving and students are involved in evaluating the provision.
- There is no workplace learning in Year 13.

Commentary

204. Health and social care is an AVCE course which has been introduced quite recently. It is taught by teachers from the science department. Students sat the final examination for the first time in 2003. Results were average and students' progress from their GCSE results was as expected.

205. There is currently a small group in Year 13 and two larger classes in Year 12. Standards in Year 13 are above average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Year 13 students are developing a good knowledge and understanding of physiology and anatomy, because these scientific aspects are taught well. Their learning in other aspects, including sociology, childcare and care for the elderly, is developing satisfactorily.

206. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers bring strengths from their science backgrounds and are developing their knowledge of the whole curriculum. Lessons include a good balance of explanation, research, and opportunities for students to work independently in pairs and groups. The approach to learning required by vocational courses is new to most students and they enjoy the opportunity to do their own research and work independently. Year 13 students feel that they floundered somewhat the start of the course because their prior experiences had been much more structured, but that they are getting more support from staff this year. Students have work experience in Year 12, though not all their work is linked securely to real applications. There is no workplace learning for Year 13 students, and this reduces their opportunities to consolidate theoretical learning through linking it with real contexts. Students' attitudes are generally positive but their learning is hindered by significant absence in some lessons and a lack of punctuality. Students' work is carefully assessed and they are given clear guidance on how to improve their work to meet the criteria for the higher grades. Year 13 students appreciate the one-to-one feedback from staff in their tutorial sessions. Students' progress in relation to their targets is monitored effectively.

207. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The planning of the curriculum is sound. There are good links with the science department, but not enough links with the sociology and psychology departments to add to the expertise in these aspects. The department has no base, and most lessons take place in science laboratories. This is unsatisfactory because staff cannot create an ethos of vocational learning, with ready availability of professional journals and other resources. Visits to other schools or colleges that run a health and social care course would provide very useful staff development.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

208. All students take an A-level examination in general studies. In most years, results have been well above average. In 2003 they were above average and students made better progress than would be expected from their GCSE results. Since the start of the current school year, general studies is taught on focus days. One focus day was sampled during the inspection. In one session, Year 12 students learned about the issues surrounding public service broadcasting from two BBC producers. Students asked some perceptive questions and because the answers were at first hand, they gained a good insight into one aspect of the politics of the media.

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		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		2
Students' achievement	2	2
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	2	1
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
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).