

INSPECTION REPORT

RAINHAM MARK GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Gillingham

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118892

Headteacher: S J Decker

Lead inspector: W J Powell

Dates of inspection: 8 - 12 December 2003

Inspection number: 259141

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

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Terms used in this report

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

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1196
School address:	Pump Lane Gillingham
Postcode:	ME8 7AJ
Telephone number:	01634 364151
Fax number:	01634 260209
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Elaine Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	24 November 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is located on the north coast of Kent, and is one of several grammar (selective) schools in the area, although this is the only one that takes boys and girls. Boys outnumber girls by three to two, reflecting the fact that there are more places for girls in local single sex grammar schools. With 1196 pupils and students, it is of above average size; the sixth form, with 318 students, is well above average size. The school is bidding to become a specialist science college; at present it is a Healthy School, an Investor in People, and has the Sportsmark Award. The pupils come from over 30 primary schools in the area, serving communities with a very wide range of deprivation. The areas closest to the school are some of the most deprived in the region. Overall, the school serves an area with slightly more disadvantage than usual. The standards at entry to the main school are well above average overall. The sixth form recruits pupils of above average attainment. About 90 per cent of pupils in Year 11 transfer to the sixth form, together with 30 or so pupils drawn from other schools locally, and from overseas. There are 19 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, one of whom has a Statement of Special Educational Need; these are low figures for a school of this size. There are small numbers with specific learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural needs, and visual and physical disabilities. There are two pupils who are at an early stage of learning English; overall, however, about five per cent of pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Most pupils at the school come from white British backgrounds. The main groups from which the other pupils are drawn are Asian/Asian British, non-British white, and Chinese, although there are small numbers from many other minority ethnic groups. There are no traveller or refugee pupils in the school. The level of pupil mobility is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3174	W J Powell	Lead inspector	Business studies 16-18
11575	C Fish	Lay inspector	
4486	M Weller	Team inspector	English 11-18; English as an additional language
27719	P Metcalf	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-18
22691	R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science 11-16; chemistry 16-18
10053	J Simms	Team inspector	Art 11-18; business studies 11-16
15051	L Kaufmann	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-18
15462	C Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography 11-18
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	History 11-16; psychology 16-18; special educational needs
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT) 11-18
27666	J Dockrell	Team inspector	Modern languages 11-16; French 16-18
31673	J Gwyer-Roberts	Team inspector	Music 11-18
20395	C Rowe	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education 16-18; citizenship 11-16
15849	P Buzzing	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The effectiveness of the school is good. In addition to strong academic performance, the school provides very well for the personal development of pupils from all backgrounds, raising their expectations of what education can offer. It gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Academic performance in tests and examination is the top five per cent of schools in the country.
- Pupils of all backgrounds and ethnic groups achieve well, doing better in work seen than would be expected when they join the school.
- The pupils' personal development is very good, and their very positive attitudes to learning reflect the school's emphasis on the value of education for its own sake, including higher education.
- Teaching and learning are good, with examples of very good practice in almost all subjects, and have an emphasis on enthusiasm for subjects, and high expectations of what can be achieved.
- The school works well with its pupils, their parents, and the wider community.
- The school is very well led; very good leadership is present in depth, and the governors provide very good guidance on how the school should develop.

But...

- The proportion of teaching that is no more than satisfactory could be reduced further by targeting work more sharply.
- Inadequate accommodation limits achievement in physical education.
- The school does not meet the statutory requirements for collective worship.

The improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have risen, teaching is better, and there is far more attention to the personal development of the pupils. The key issues raised in 1997 have been tackled in most respects.

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 pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is good overall. The school's test and examination results in Years 9 and 11 are high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Standards seen during the inspection are well above average at all levels, careful preparation for examinations then lifting this to the levels seen in the table above. Achievement at all levels is good, including in English, mathematics, and science; the skills needed to ensure high standards are developed well as pupils move up the school.

The pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, are very good. Attendance, behaviour, and attitudes are all very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good overall. Teaching and learning are good at all levels, with teachers having very good subject knowledge and expectations; the pupils' very positive attitudes

create a very good ethos for learning. Achievement in physical education is limited by the accommodation.

The curriculum is good, with very good improvement from the previous inspection. Care, guidance, and welfare arrangements are very good, as is partnership with parents and the wider community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. Governance and leadership are very good; management is good. The school does not meet fully the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils are very pleased with the school, noting particularly its high expectations and good teaching. However, pupils are right to be concerned about lunch arrangements.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- reduce still further the proportion of teaching that is no more than satisfactory, noting:
- the use that teachers make of the good data held on pupils' progress when they are planning and delivering work for the range of pupils in a class; and
- the identification and management of pupils with special educational needs.
- improve the quality of accommodation for physical education in order to raise achievement and provision in the subject.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is **good** and it gives very good cost effectiveness. This is better than at the time of the previous inspection. Achievement is good overall for students from all backgrounds, and standards are well above average.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average, and male and female students alike achieve well across a wide range of subjects.
 - Teaching and learning are good; specialist teachers and very good challenge are key strengths.
 - There is a good range of subjects offered, and students receive very good advice about their choice of options.
 - The new head of sixth form provides very good leadership and has mapped out a clear set of priorities for its further development.
 - The school is very successful in raising students' expectations of higher education choices.
- But...
- Assessment could be better used to target work to the needs of students.

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	Very good in English because of very good teaching that makes effective use of assessment. Good in French with good teaching now coming from a redesigned scheme of work.
Mathematics	Good . Teaching is good and prepares students well for examinations, but assessment data and ICT could be better used.
Science	Very good in chemistry , where work is covered in depth and there is very good use of ICT to enhance learning.
Information and communication technology	Very good . Students achieve well on the demanding new course, thanks to very good teaching.
Humanities	Very good in geography , where high standards reflect very good teaching. There is very good assessment and guidance. Very good in psychology , because achievements are tracked very closely, and the students are motivated. Very good in religious education , because of teaching that is often inspirational and intellectually demanding.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology . Teachers share teaching of the course, and this results in students getting a wide-ranging view of its content.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Visual and performing arts and media	Good in art and design. Standards are high, with students' work showing good individuality. Good in music, where good teaching is challenging and uses resources well.
Business	Good. Work is marked by intellectual rigour and challenge. Students achieve well because they are successful in drawing together the various parts of the course.

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

Very good advice is given to students about their choice of course, and post-school options. They are encouraged to aim high.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good overall. The new head of sixth form has established clear lines for development based on effective monitoring of current provision.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are positive about the sixth form on the whole. The inspectors judge that their criticisms of the range of enrichment activities, and of the support that they receive, are not justified. Inspectors agree that the teaching is done well, and is challenging.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of work seen are well above average for the ends of Years 9 and 11, and in the sixth form. Achievement by boys and girls from all backgrounds is good at all levels.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards overall in tests and examinations are high by national standards for boys and girls alike.
- The school's Year 9 test results are higher than would be expected from the pupils' Year 6 test scores.
- Overall, achievement in work seen is good at all levels because of good teaching and very good attitudes to work. There are only isolated cases of underachievement, more than offset by very good achievement elsewhere.
- Standards of literacy, numeracy, and ICT are well above average.

But...

- A small minority of pupils could still do better, because of shortcomings in their writing, or in how well work is matched to their needs.

Commentary

Main school

1. Standards at entry are well above average overall. In English, mathematics, and science, entry standards have been rising and are now high. Those in other subjects are more variable, but generally at least above average. The intake profile varies from year to year, both in terms of the relative standards of boys and girls, and also in terms of different skills. For example, the pupils in the current Years 10 and 11 had markedly lower quantitative skills at entry, and their attainments covered a wider range than usually seen.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	40.8 (41.4)	33.3 (33.3)
Mathematics	45.4 (46.0)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	40.0 (41.8)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 164 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. In the tests taken at the end of Year 9, the overall standard in recent years, including 2003, has been high in relation to the national average, and in the highest five per cent of schools nationally. The trend of improvement has matched that seen in the country as a whole. Overall, pupils do far better than would have been expected from their Year 6 test scores; the value added by the pupils between Years 7 and 9 is in the highest five per cent of schools nationally in both 2002 and 2003. The achievement of these pupils was therefore particularly good. However, whilst English and mathematics results in 2003 are high, those in science were lower, although still well above average. This reflects in part this year group's slightly lower non-verbal and quantitative skills at entry. Girls performed better than boys in all three subjects, but the margin between them is narrower than is seen nationally.

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	99.4 (97.1)	53 (49.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (97.7)	91 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	95 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	n/a* (50.4)	34.5 (34.6)

*There were 173 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. * The school is awaiting the outcome of appeals in several cases which could affect this figure.*

3. The overall trend in results has been one of high standards against national averages, but rising at a slightly lower rate than in schools as a whole. Boys and girls perform at broadly similar levels; the gap between their respective results is lower than that seen nationally. In 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining at least five GCSEs at grade C or better was high in national terms, as was the average points score. However, the results for passes at G were slightly lower, although still well above the average. Analysis suggests that lower attaining boys were at the core of this relative underachievement. Overall, pupils gained results that were in line with those expected from their test results two years earlier. In 2003, all measures are high in national terms, and represent the best results on record for the school, with markedly less variation between boys and girls at lower levels. There were no major differences in standards between subjects.

4. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average overall for the ends of Years 9 and 11. This is slightly lower than recent test and examination performances, but it is clear that the school has good programmes of examination preparation to ensure that pupils reach high standards in the second half of Years 9 and 11. There are no major differences in the standards reached by boys and girls at any level. The achievement of pupils is good by Years 9 and 11; at each stage of learning, they make faster than average gains to maintain their high relative standing in national terms. Between Years 7 and 9, the high value that is added reflects the school's success, for the most part, in working with the very wide range of prior experience of subjects that the pupils bring from almost 30 different primary schools. At all levels, pupils consolidate earlier work very well and, as they become older, show a very good ability to apply what they have learned, make cross-connections within and between subjects, and above all, almost all of them write concisely, illustrating and evaluating what they have done. These are the hallmarks of high academic quality.

5. There are few variations between subjects; most show at least above average, and more usually well above average, standards and almost all demonstrate good achievement at all levels. Pupils and parents identified the progress that pupils make as a major strength. Achievement in design and technology is very good, reflecting a very considerable redesign of courses, and a thorough overhaul of teaching in the recent past. In art and design, achievement is no more than satisfactory across Years 7 to 11, because the growing volume of assessment data now available is not being used to set clear and ambitious targets for improvement. In physical education, satisfactory rather than good achievement between Years 7 and 11 is mainly the result of constraints imposed by the inadequate accommodation for the subject. Satisfactory rather than good achievement in ICT in Years 10 and 11 reflects recent problems with arrangements for examining the subject; these have now been resolved.

6. Pupils with special educational needs show satisfactory achievement overall. Their progress in subjects varies. It is good in English, design and technology, modern languages, history, and business studies, where their learning needs are well known to teachers, and are met through careful planning of tasks and teaching. In other subjects, their progress is satisfactory, apart from in science in Years 7 to 9, where it is sometimes slowed by work not being sufficiently well

matched to these pupils' needs. At present, the quality of pupils' targets in their individual education plans, and the management of how these are implemented, lack consistency. Pupils who come from minority ethnic groups show similar achievement to their peers; the school analyses results by ethnicity to monitor this. Gifted and talented pupils are now starting to benefit from a more rigorous programme of identification. Such pupils show good achievement overall. They achieve particularly well in subjects where they are clearly identified, and where appropriately challenging work is set to ensure that they are fully stretched. Thus they make very good progress in English and science for example, as a result of very well planned opportunities for them to work at a demanding level. In other subjects planning to ensure appropriate challenge and enrichment is less well advanced. The small number of pupils who have English as an additional language at an early stage make at least satisfactory progress; overall, achievement for such pupils is good.

7. Within this positive overall picture of achievement, there are small numbers of individuals who could still do better. Some lower attaining pupils, more often boys than girls, lack the polish in their extended writing that is needed to get high GCSE grades. The successful work being done in business studies, history, and religious education, for example, shows that careful structuring of writing can make a significant improvement; at present, this is not reflected in all subjects. In music in Years 10 and 11, the lack of access to instrumental lessons means that some potentially talented pupils do less well than they could. A small proportion of the pupils with English as an additional language do not get the support that they need in some of their lessons, and so achieve at no more than a satisfactory rate in them. In some subjects, but particularly in design and technology, mathematics and music, some pupils do not get off to as fast a start as they could in Year 7. This is because there is not enough matching of work between Rainham Mark and the large number of its partner primary schools over the Year 6 to 7 period.
8. Standards of reading and writing, and of speaking and listening, are well above average overall, although the support for these aspects of development varies between subjects. For example, not all teachers follow the school's clear guidance on the correction of spelling and punctuation. Standards of numeracy are well above average, reflecting the school's good emphasis on this area, for example through providing training for all teachers, and in ensuring that each subject has a link teacher within the mathematics department. Standards of ICT use are also well above average, the result of the school's work to ensure that all pupils receive a good grounding in the subject. As a result, they are effective and informed users of ICT in their work at all levels.

Sixth form

9. Standards at entry to the sixth form are above average, reflecting the relatively open-access nature of the school's provisions within the local area.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	94.5 (98)	n/a (95)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	n/a* (53)	n/a (39)
Average point score per pupil	n/a* (372.9)	n/a (263.3)

*There were 139 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. *This figure is not available, pending the outcome of appeals.*

10. Standards in recent years have been rising steadily, and well above average overall, with little difference between the results of male and female students. In 2002, male and female students alike gained results that were high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. There has been a slight fall in 2003, in part reflecting the fact that the school no longer enters candidates for key skills certification, and also because of changes in examination arrangements for general

studies. Overall, students tend to be gaining grades that are at least in line with what would be expected from their prior attainments at GCSE. The school's analyses show that students who have English as an additional language, and those from minority ethnic groups, perform at levels that would be expected from their prior attainments at GCSE. There are no marked patterns of value added by sex. Retention rates are good.

11. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average overall, representing good achievement in relation to standards at entry. The numbers of students following many courses are too small to allow reliable statistical comparison with national data. However, in 2002, the last year for which national data were available, standards were high in economics and art, well above average in biology, chemistry, English literature, general studies, mathematics, and music, and average in business studies, theatre studies, and religious education.
12. As in the main school, there are no significant patterns of achievement by ethnicity; gifted and talented students show good achievement. Detailed analyses of individuals' results against their prior GCSE performance show only isolated cases of significant underachievement by individuals. These are usually lower attainers, and in some cases, underachievement reflects patchy attendance or non-completion of coursework.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance in the main school is very good; it is good in the sixth form. The pupils' and students' attitudes and their behaviour are very good. Their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils have very positive views of the main school and show they want to come by the very good levels of attendance.
- The pupils and students have very positive approaches to all the school offers, and this helps them achieve well.
- Their behaviour is very good around the school and in nearly all lessons.
- The pupils and students work in an environment that encourages them to take on responsibilities and to use their initiative.
- All four strands of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development are very good. Pupils express their opinions and values clearly, by speaking and writing, and through their actions.
- Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong but are also able to understand why people sometimes hold different opinions.

But...

- There are some lessons in the main school where low levels of background chatter go unchecked.

Commentary

Main school

13. The pupils overwhelmingly express positive views of the school. Their level of satisfaction about what they are offered is reflected in the very high level of attendance, with only a very few absences that are not for acceptable reasons. The small rise in these is the result of the school's refusal to authorise any excessive holidays during term time; requests for these have reduced considerably, indicating that parents are beginning to value more the education their children are receiving.

Attendance

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.6%	School data	0.1%
National data	7.8%	National data	1.2%

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

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2002-2003

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.7%	School data	0.3%
National data	Not available	National data	Not available

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

- The pupils demonstrate very high levels of interest in everything going on in school. This makes a major contribution to the good achievement seen. For example, instant quiet descends in the hall when the person taking assembly stands up to start. They listen intently to what is being said with no fidgeting or coughing, and willingly talk about it afterwards expressing their own views and opinions on points raised. This interest continues into most lessons, where the pupils' very positive attitudes contribute significantly to their learning. Their ability and willingness to concentrate and work hard show a genuine desire to learn and to achieve well. For example, in a Year 9 religious education lesson, the pupils set about their work quickly and with confidence, because they were really interested in the topic. This enthusiasm in lessons spills out of the classroom and is shown in the good levels of participation in the out of class activities provided, ranging from sporting and musical activities to hotly contested inter-form Scrabble competitions.
- The behaviour overall in and out of lessons is very good. There are no racial tensions; pupils from different backgrounds mix well. The pupils behave very well in nearly all lessons because they recognise that misbehaviour interferes with their own and other pupils' learning. However, there are a few instances where low levels of chatter go unchecked; this is a distraction to other pupils and is often caused by the teacher not taking a firm enough line on behaviour. The same class or group is often much better behaved with other teachers who have better behaviour management skills. Exclusions are used only as a last resort with an appropriate re-induction programme in place that strives to tackle and resolve the causes.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1003	27	1
White – Irish	2		
White – any other White background	30		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	9	1	
Mixed – White and Black African	4		
Mixed – White and Asian	5		
Mixed – any other mixed background	4		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	37	1	
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	9		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2		
Black or Black British – African	5		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2		
Chinese	15		
Any other ethnic group	10		
No ethnic group recorded	76		

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

16. No concerns about bullying were raised either in the pupils' questionnaire or in meetings with them because they know what to do if any problems arise. They know that problems will be resolved. The school knows that bullying does occur and is alert to it.
17. The school actively encourages the pupils to take responsibility and use their initiative. Within forms, pupils are elected as form and games captains, and as year council representatives. They also take on other responsibilities within the classroom. They are encouraged to be involved in the annual charity week, by organising events and activities such as selling a calendar containing pictures of staff as babies. Year 10 pupils are provided with a very good opportunity to show their initiative during industry days, where they have to solve problems set for them by local industry.
18. The school clearly values the personal development of its pupils, and the impact on their behaviour and attitudes is very good. During their time in school, pupils' understanding of themselves and other people develops well. They are beginning to explore their principles and beliefs. They show a developing respect for others and their different cultures and beliefs. They are beginning to understand their own strengths and weaknesses but they are not frightened to have a go at something new. Most pupils have a well-founded understanding of concepts such as beauty, kindness, love, and hate, and can explain these concisely and clearly.
19. The high standards of personal development achieved by all pupils in the school are due in large measure to the recognition the school gives to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. Teachers place much emphasis on fostering pupils' self-confidence and esteem.

Teachers talk with pupils respectfully, encourage reflection, seek opinions, and listen to answers. They give pupils meaningful jobs and other responsibilities. Pupils have a very good appreciation of their local culture and a good understanding of the different cultures found in Britain. As a consequence, pupils are genuinely reflective, can clearly think beyond the material world, and show respect and tolerance for all members of their community.

Sixth form

20. The students display very good attitudes to their learning because they have goals they want to achieve and know they must work hard to reach them. The very good relationships that develop amongst the students and with the teachers help the students to build their confidence; these help them cope with the fast pace required to cover all the necessary work. They also use their developing confidence very well to tackle new challenges enthusiastically. For example, in religious education in Year 12 the students cope very well with the philosophical content of the course because they rise to this challenge set. Attendance in the sixth form is good, with a high level of course completion.
21. The students are very good role models and play a very important role in the school. They often act as mentors or befriend younger pupils. Prefects selected from their ranks are attached to each form in Years 7, 8 and 9; pupils often see them as the first point of contact if they have problems. The prefects usually perform this role very sensitively and with high levels of responsibility. For example, a prefect seeing one of his form waiting for the head of lower school, was very quick to see if everything was all right. The students help at open days and presentation evenings and are heavily involved in the organisation of a charity week. Many thousands of pounds are raised by the school, reflecting the huge effort put in by the organisers. The sixth form's Young Enterprise groups have enjoyed great success in recent times and this year's group – Trinity Enterprises - is very eager to follow this tradition; they already show a great deal of determination and acumen that will be a great asset to them now and in later life. Recently the students have initiated a school magazine, which is developing and improving rapidly.
22. Personal development continues to be very good for students in the sixth form. Provision for spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development remains very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good overall. Teaching and learning are good at all levels in the school, as is the curriculum; some aspects are very good. The school cares for, and guides, its pupils very well. Partnership with parents and the wider community is very good, and that with other schools satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall, and in each of the three main stages of education in the school. Assessment is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is done by subject specialists, most of whom communicate their enthusiasm for their subject to the pupils and students.
- Most lessons are characterised by very good challenge; pupils are expected to work hard, and to value education in its own right.
- Almost all subjects contain examples of very good or excellent teaching; good practice is widespread.

But...

- Teaching that is no more than satisfactory is concentrated in Years 7 to 9, so that in some subjects, pupils could get off to a faster start.
- Not all teachers do enough to make sure that the needs of all pupils are being met in lessons, in part because of inconsistencies in the use of assessment by class teachers.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 173 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10 (6%)	47 (27%)	73 (42%)	39 (23%)	4 (2%)	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.

Main school

23. The overall quality of teaching is good, but there are variations. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is far lower than at the time of the previous inspection, and more teaching is now good, but, whilst there have been improvements, aspects of assessment and how the pupils' special educational needs are met still need further work. Parents and pupils regard teaching as good. The proportion of teaching that is very good or excellent, or is unsatisfactory, is similar across Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. The main difference lies in the relative proportions of good and satisfactory teaching. In Years 7 to 9, the two proportions are the same, but in Years 10 and 11, almost three times as much teaching is good than is satisfactory. A particular strength of teaching is that most is done by specialists, who know their subjects well; most are enthusiasts in their field. This helps to develop the pupils' good knowledge and understanding of subjects. Another hallmark of most lessons is that there are very good expectations of work and behaviour overall. More importantly, as so many pupils are from homes without a tradition of higher education, there is a strong ethos of making pupils realise that they can, and should, value education for its own sake; that they can fly. The good relationships that develop between pupils and staff produce a positive and purposeful learning environment; for the most part, pupils trust their teachers.
24. Examples of very good or excellent teaching are found in all years, and in all subjects except art. This means that subject teams can look to their own practice, as well as that in the school as a whole, in order to see how to improve. Teaching is very good at all levels in design and technology, and in history. It is also very good in Years 7 to 9 in modern languages, and in Years 10 and 11 in English and science. Apart from art, where teaching is satisfactory at all levels, teaching is good in all other subjects, and leads to the good achievement that is seen across the main school.

Example of outstanding practice

During the inspection, excellent teaching occurred in a significant minority of lessons in the science department. This example demonstrates very effective use of both old and new technologies..

In a Year 11 science lesson about the movement of plates in the Earth's crust, there was vigorous pace and clear purpose from the start. The lesson objectives, in terms of what would be learned by students rather than covered by the teacher, were prominently displayed on the board. Excellent progression of learning was built into the lesson. Excellent use of the interactive whiteboard showed the location of fossils and of volcanic activity around the world.

Pupils played a significant role in the development of the lesson through the teacher's skilful use of questions; eventually the pupils proposed the theory of the movement of tectonic plates. The teacher then demonstrated, using the ICT capabilities of the whiteboard, how it would have been possible for South America to be part of Africa, and, using Plasticine, how fossils of fish could have moved to the slopes of Mount Everest. Pupils were clearly astounded when the speed of convection currents was compared with the growth of fingernails.

The closing session involved pupils recording individually, and then discussing, three key points learnt during the lesson. The homework included further challenge in writing a letter to Wegener about his theory of plate tectonics.

25. The unsatisfactory teaching occurred in one lesson in each of geography and science, and in two German lessons. All four lessons had common features. Above all, the lessons lacked challenge; the teachers expected far too little of the pupils in the time available; the pupils were clearly capable of working faster and at a higher level. This soon resulted in pupils becoming bored and restless, striking up conversations with each other; this was not dealt with by the teachers. In the unsatisfactory lessons, the methods used did not inspire learning; too often, the teachers talked at, but rarely listened to, the pupils.
26. In contrast, the very good and excellent lessons carried the hallmarks of high expectations and thorough planning. Teachers left pupils in no doubt, right from the outset, that they would be expected to think and work hard. In such a climate, they work very well. Clear lesson objectives defining learning outcomes, not teaching activities, were shared with the class; in the best cases, assessment details were also shared, so that pupils knew what they must do to improve their performance. Starter activities were demanding, fast-paced and peppered with open-ended questions that made the pupils sit up and think. A common feature of these high quality lessons was that the teacher had planned a good range and variety of activities that would meet the learning needs of all the pupils in the group. Boys in particular responded very positively to this. In several cases, the need to extend lower attaining boys' writing was a specific target of the lesson. Learning was certainly not a passive affair; from the start, pupils were doing rather than sitting back, listening. Yet the teachers still taught; in particular, they used demonstration and exemplification well to show what was required, before then supporting pupils well as they worked.
27. The difference between good teaching and that which is no more than satisfactory is most evident in Years 7 to 9. The better teaching in Years 10 and 11 is reflected in the fact that these pupils tend to work very hard in lessons; lower down the school, application is good, but less focused. In part, this reflects the fact that the pupils, coming from so many primary schools, take time to be known by staff. In particular, curriculum liaison with primary partners is relatively undeveloped, and in some cases, such as mathematics or design and technology, this leads to primary school work being repeated. It also results from some teachers not being sufficiently aware of the implications of the data on pupils that are now being provided; this is reflected in reports in the earlier years, which contain more about attitudes than detailed guidance on improvement and targets. Few subjects are set by prior attainment, but the intake, although selective, is still a wide one. Thus there is a wide range of needs within a typical class. The teaching that is no more than satisfactory tends not to reflect the needs of all pupils sufficiently well, for example by matching tasks to needs. It also tends to give pupils fewer opportunities to

take responsibility for their own learning; such lessons are often dominated by the teacher talking too much, even when pupils are meant to be working on their own or in small groups.

28. Most teachers meet the needs of all pupils well. Pupils from minority ethnic groups are involved fully in the work of classes; in some areas, such as religious education, this is done with great sensitivity. However, weaknesses in the quality of the targets in individual education plans mean that pupils with special education needs are not always supported as well as they could be in some subjects. At present, there is relatively little whole-school monitoring of how well plans are matched to work in mainstream classrooms, or how well pupils are working towards their targets. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well in English, design and technology, modern languages, history, and business studies. Individual learning needs are well known, and teachers use a range of methods to match work to their needs. Exceptionally detailed planning in design and technology provides very good support, and withdrawal in English is well targeted on the improvement of literacy skills. Shortcomings in provision for pupils with special educational needs were also noted at the time of the previous inspection.
29. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment are satisfactory. Good procedures are in place to assess, record and monitor pupils' achievements at whole school level. The analysis of assessment data and value-added factors is methodical amongst senior managers; it is less rigorous in some subject departments. Target setting is well established in Years 10 and 11, and recently introduced into Year 9. It has yet to be embedded for younger pupils, although some promising work is emerging to determine entry standards in some subjects. This gap is a factor in the greater prevalence of satisfactory teaching at this level. Assessment overall is very good in history, music, and in design and technology, where it is used as a real tool for learning. However, similar, coherent developments have yet to be extended to all subject departments. The school policy provides insufficient guidelines to generate consistency across the school, and monitoring by middle managers is not always as systematic as it might be. Thus, although the quality and regularity of assessment is much improved since the previous inspection, inconsistencies persist both between and within subjects. For example, inconsistencies in teachers' marking occur in mathematics and science.
30. The use of assessment information to respond to individual needs is satisfactory overall. Heads of year keep useful records to monitor their pupils' progress, enabling them to follow up underachievement. Appropriate internal tests and examinations, together with statutory national assessments, provide teachers with relevant information about all pupils' achievements. However, they do not always act upon this information systematically in order to set work which meets the learning needs of individuals. The recent identification of gifted and talented pupils in Year 9 has yet to be translated into challenging tasks in a number of subjects, although some promising work has begun to extend their computing skills.
31. The pupils' understanding of how they can improve is satisfactory. In most subjects, it is better in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school, because marking is more regularly linked to national criteria; at this level, pupils also have clear academic targets to guide them. In the most effective subjects, pupils receive explicit guidance on what they need to do to reach the next GCSE grade or National Curriculum level. Thus, pupils know how they are progressing in English; their self-assessments help them in geography and music; and exemplar materials in design technology help them to compare their work to national benchmarks. However, their understanding is less secure in some other areas of the curriculum. In discussion, pupils know what their target minimum grades are, but seem less sure about how their teachers arrive at them, or how they might be used.

Sixth Form

32. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen at this level. In the sixth form, almost nine-tenths of lessons seen showed teaching that was good or better; over two-fifths was very good or excellent. Teaching was very good overall in English,

chemistry, ICT, geography, psychology, religious education, and in design and technology. It was good in all other subjects.

33. Sixth form teaching develops further the many strengths seen in the main school. In particular, the very well qualified teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects is more marked, and contributes to the evident enjoyment of the work by many students. Challenge is also generally very good; students are expected to be accurate in their work, and to show the higher order skills of evaluation and analysis that are needed at this level. For example, an excellent AS lesson in ICT showed that the teacher had a very good understanding of the mathematics and physics behind the work on data transmission, as well as the ICT implications. Learning was consolidated by a challenging exercise, and the teacher's outstanding knowledge of the material was used well to clarify their understanding. This lesson was also outstanding in that it used visual representations of highly technical concepts wherever possible. The students knew exactly what was going on and showed very good achievement.
34. In the small number of no more than satisfactory lessons, the main characteristic was that the teachers tended to talk too much; the students played a relatively passive role in the work, expecting to be spoon-fed. As in the main school, there was also insufficient attention paid to the range of the students' prior attainments and needs.
35. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment are good in the sixth form. Rigorous data analyses and value added procedures ensure that transition from the main school is smooth. Sometimes, data on their earlier progress are less well known when students join the sixth form from other schools. There is close monitoring of standards and achievement by the senior management team, head of sixth form, and most subject teachers. Systems to chart each student's academic progress are good and target setting is well-established.
36. Most teachers make good use of the available assessment information to respond effectively to students' individual needs. Thus, they benefit from: teachers' very thorough diagnostic marking and one-to-one mentoring in English; systematic support in psychology; and half-termly checks on work in geography. Good practices also exist in business studies. The effective use of examination board assessment criteria ensures that students are well-prepared by the end of Year 13.
37. Across the range of subjects inspected in depth, the students' understanding of how they can improve is good overall. It is good in business studies, mathematics, modern languages, music, and in design and technology, where teachers provide clear guidance on how to achieve the next grade.

The curriculum

The school provides a good curriculum in all year groups. Opportunities for the enrichment of learning are also good. The provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been very good improvement in the management and delivery of the curriculum since the previous inspection, where it was a key issue for improvement.
 - There is very good provision for citizenship throughout the main school.
 - The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 offers a wide range of subjects and courses; the range in the sixth form is very good.
 - The school is well staffed by specialists and has good accommodation in most subjects.
- But...
- Planning to provide for the pupils who have special educational needs is not comprehensive and coherent enough to guarantee that the learning needs of all these pupils are fully identified and met.
 - Inadequate accommodation restricts achievement in physical education and music.

Commentary

Whole school

38. The school provides a good curriculum for its pupils, which is much better than at the time of the previous inspection. All subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education fully meet statutory requirements. The programme for citizenship is a particular strength; provision for careers education and guidance is good, as is that for personal, social and health education.
39. The school does not have enough sufficiently large spaces to offer a full programme of year group assemblies, and has not developed sufficiently adequate alternative arrangements to meet the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.
40. There are good opportunities for enrichment. A varied programme of interesting and relevant activities is offered in the lunch break and after school. Many of these involve music and sport, and some are targeted at particular year groups. Many pupils take advantage of the good provision; clubs are well supported. The school organises a good range of cultural events and visits to extend the pupils' experiences. There are trips to France and Germany, for example, linked to the modern languages department and the religious education department takes some pupils to Egypt. There are school productions and concerts.
41. There is good access and opportunity for pupils of all ages, backgrounds and attainments. The needs of the small number of pupils who do not have English as their mother tongue are satisfactorily met. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. In addition, a few are withdrawn by the English department to tackle specific needs, such as those arising from dyslexia and weaknesses in literacy. Others, including those with a Statement of Special Educational Need, are monitored and supported individually. Special arrangements are made to assist these pupils to succeed in external examinations. Overall however, planning does not take into account the need for a more coherent and comprehensive programme to ensure that the learning requirements of pupils' wide ranging special educational needs are identified and fully met in the school as a whole. Individual education plans are not detailed enough in providing targets, criteria and strategies to help pupils improve.
42. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified, but subject departments are trying a variety of strategies to challenge these pupils, and the provision, though satisfactory, is not yet fully developed in all areas of the curriculum; this work is at an early stage.

Main school

43. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 has particular strengths in citizenship, in economic awareness, and in providing discrete drama lessons for all pupils. There are no unsatisfactory elements in subjects at this level and some provision is excellent, such as that in modern foreign languages, where all pupils study two languages for a minimum of two years. The programme for ICT is good and enables the pupils to reach high standards, so that their work with computers supports their learning well across the curriculum.
44. In Years 10 and 11, the school provides a wide variety of GCSE courses, and makes appropriate use of the growing flexibility in the National Curriculum at this level; cases of disapplication from the National Curriculum are correctly handled. The school works hard to ensure that pupils are able to take the range of options that they wish to study. Provision for cross-curricular ICT skills is satisfactory. The options that pupils study in Years 10 and 11 link well with the sixth form programmes, so that the 14 to 19 stage of learning shows good coherence.
45. As this is a selective school, and the range of attainment is narrower than in many schools, the grouping arrangements in several subjects involve pupils of all levels of attainment in the same

class. Where the grouping is as wide as this, in a minority of cases, the curriculum does not always meet the needs of individuals as effectively as it might. For example, the provision for gifted and talented pupils does not always fully challenge them, and that for pupils with special educational needs is not always sharply focused. However, these cases are the minority, and the school is refining its provision for such groups.

46. The school's arrangements for literacy and numeracy are good overall, though there is still some variation in practice between departments. There is now good practice in developing the pupils' skills in ICT.
47. The match of teachers to the curriculum is good overall. In some subjects, such as history and science, it is very good. Nearly all teachers have good qualifications, which match the subjects they teach. The teachers are very well supported by line managers and senior management. The school has very good systems of induction, appraisal and continuing professional development, which meet the needs of the school as well as individuals' careers. The school has very good provision also for the recruitment and retention of staff; staff turnover has fallen sharply over the recent past. This provides high levels of continuity and stability as well as loyalty and commitment. The match of support staff to the needs of the school is satisfactory and ensures the smooth running of the school and sound management of its systems.
48. The provision of learning resources in the school is good. Areas of concern raised in the previous inspection have been dealt with satisfactorily. Most subjects have at least adequate quantities of textbooks. The school library has been refurbished. Unused and outdated books have been weeded out and there was major spending on new books and computers in the period 2000 to 2001 with nearly 3000 new books purchased since then. The use of the library by pupils has improved. It is busy at lunchtimes and at the end of school. Most subjects make suggestions for titles to augment the stock and a number of subjects such as English, history, science, and religious education organise library-based lessons. The school's ICT resources have also improved and most subjects either have access to their own computers or those in central areas. The use and availability of ICT is particularly good in art, business studies, design and technology, music, and science. Insufficient use is made of ICT in mathematics.
49. Overall, the accommodation is good. The facilities for learning in many areas such as mathematics and in design and technology are very good, and provide a stimulating learning environment. In physical education and music, however, current provision is unsatisfactory because the accommodation is very limited; it restricts curricular opportunity and pupils are not achieving highly enough. There are plans to start work on improving music facilities within the next month.

Sixth form.

50. The good sixth form curriculum has undergone considerable development since the previous inspection. The range of subjects available to the students is very good. Religious education is now satisfactorily in place, both as part of the general studies course, and in the form of sixth form conference days. The range of 14 to 19 learning pathways is being extended through co-operation with other schools in a consortium arrangement, and whilst not many students currently take up this option, the opportunities are there, and they are increasing. The school meets the needs of its sixth form students well: all students were able to study their first choice of subjects for 2003. Key skills are not taught discretely; all subjects and in particular general studies play their part in ensuring that communication skills, application of number and ICT contribute effectively to the students' achievement.
51. The replies to the questionnaire indicate that the students themselves do not feel that there is a good range of enrichment courses and worthwhile activities. Much of this view results from the students' frustration with the limited facilities for physical education. Inspectors sympathise with their difficulties, but judge that the school does its best, and the full range of enrichment activities offered to sixth formers is judged as good overall.

52. The match of teachers to the sixth form curriculum is good overall. In some subjects, such as chemistry and psychology, it is very good. Nearly all teachers have good qualifications, which match the subjects they teach. The teachers are very well supported by line managers and senior management. The sixth form has very good provision also for the recruitment and retention of staff. This provides high levels of continuity and stability as well as loyalty and commitment. The match of support staff to the needs of the sixth form courses is satisfactory and ensures its smooth running and the sound day to day management of its systems.
53. Learning resources in the sixth form are good, with students having good textbooks in most subjects, and access to a much wider range of books, periodicals and other resources in the school library and in departmental collections.
54. The accommodation for the sixth form is good. The main block is self-contained and provides extensive facilities for social and learning opportunities. These are complemented by access to other areas such as ICT. Since the previous inspection, the sixth form areas have been refurbished and now form a positive learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

The school ensures the health, safety, welfare and care of its pupils and students very well. It provides good quality support, guidance and advice to the pupils in the main school; this provision is very good in the sixth form. The pupils' and students' views are very well sought and taken into account.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils and students are well cared for by members of staff, who show high levels of concern for them.
- There is very good guidance on the next step in their lives for sixth form students. This provision is good in the main school.
- The pupils and students have a positive impact on the work of the school through the school council and through their own analyses of how well subjects meet their needs.

But...

- An area was identified during a fire evacuation where people could not get away quickly enough.
- The arrangements for queueing at lunchtimes could be better.

Commentary

Main school

55. The areas of child protection and procedures for health and safety were criticised in the previous report. These matters have been successfully rectified and the procedures and practices in place are now very good. The school ensures that staff know how and to whom to report any concerns. The school has instigated very clear policies covering risk assessment and school trips. A recent monitoring visit by a health and safety advisor identified no areas of concern; the one recommendation has already been attended to. However, a fire evacuation during the inspection identified a pinch point in one area. The school is seeking healthy school status and has already made a start in this area. The school is a generally pleasant environment for all to work in because of the high level of care and concern. However, the way that lunchtimes are organised is poor. There is no staggering of arrival times, leading to much pushing and jostling. Younger pupils find the queues intimidating and overwhelming. The supply of food sometimes runs out quickly, leaving the pupils with little or no choice; this leads to even more pressure to be served early. Inspectors agree that the arrangements could be improved considerably.

56. The pupils, and their parents, are given good advice in Years 9 and 11 on choosing what to do in the next stage of their education. Meetings and conventions are held that give good quality information; advice is provided well by both school teachers and careers staff from outside. Work experience is an option in Year 11; the arrangements are good, with the school making good use of the many contacts it has made. Industry days in Year 10 give the pupils an exciting introduction to the world of work. The setting of targets, both academic and pastoral, is not yet specific enough to really focus the pupils on what exactly they need to do to improve, particularly in the lower years. The pupils set their own targets in the reports to their parents, but "working harder" is not easy to measure and achieve, unlike smaller short term targets, such as "I will practise my French verbs three times a week until half term". Furthermore, whilst heads of year monitor progress, form tutors are not as fully involved in this as is usually seen. These issues have already been identified by the school as requiring attention.
57. The school council is very well used to gauge the views of the pupils because it operates at form, year and school level, with time allocated for discussion and feedback thus involving all pupils. They speak enthusiastically about it. It has been successful in influencing their life in school, such as the availability of drinking water, both in and out of the classroom. The influence that the pupils can exert extends into what and how they are taught. Some subjects seek the pupils' views on lessons, topics, courses and subjects; this is gradually being introduced throughout the school.

Sixth Form

58. In addition to the very good provision for ensuring health, safety, care, and welfare of the pupils in the main school that also covers the sixth form, the students and staff develop very good relationships that foster a climate of purpose, hard work and fun.
59. Very good support, advice, and guidance are given to students in the sixth form about what they might do after finishing Year 13. The school works hard to raise the aspirations of both the students and their parents. For example, high achieving students are encouraged to look at courses at all universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, and to make decisions about the course, not the university. Careers information is provided by an advisor who is well known to, and very supportive of, the students. All students in Year 12 have an interview with either a local business person or a university lecturer to help hone their skills. The school works very hard to make this a really worthwhile experience by matching the interviewer's expertise with each student's interests, even to the extent of finding a vulcanologist. The very good levels of support and guidance are often extended to students who have left, an indication of the care and concern within the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The parents receive very high quality information in various forms.
- The school uses a very good range of methods to enable the parents to be involved in the decisions made about the school.
- The school is positive about creating extensive links with the community; these provide very good support for the curriculum, especially in the sixth form.
- Pastoral links with the main contributory schools are good, but curriculum links are less well developed.

But...

- Reports could be better, especially in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

Main School

60. Information made available to parents is generally of very high quality. The recently revised prospectus is colourful and easy to read, giving parents a very good overview of the school. This is well supplemented by the governors' annual report and supporting meeting. Annual reports to parents are of good quality overall. Those in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory, giving basic information, but, in many subjects, too little detail of concrete attainments and skills, and too much about the pupil's attitudes. Reports are better in Years 10 and 11, where they include grade predictions for external examinations. A good addition in reports is the comment on each subject by the pupils; these show a growing awareness of what they need to do to improve. In all reports, pupils set their own targets; however, these are often too general. Annual, very well attended, meetings between parents and subject teacher give good opportunities to discuss the pupil's progress and ways in which help might be given. Parents of pupils in Year 7 receive, in addition, an interim report in the autumn term. Parents are appreciative of this, and of the opportunity to sit in, and take part in, lessons. Other general information is sent out as necessary. The school is not complacent about the way information is sent out. To combat the inevitable losses through 'pupil post', much is already available on the website. Furthermore, the school is planning to introduce another Internet system to ensure that information is received promptly; arrangements will remain in place to use the current methods for those parents who do not have Internet access.
61. The school is eager to seek the views of parents and to involve them in its development. They are surveyed, for example, through end of year questionnaires to a sample of parents; parents of Year 7 pupils are asked about how the start of their school life has gone. The head teacher takes an active interest in the supportive Parents, Teachers and Friends Association, and this helps him to keep abreast of parental concerns and thinking informally. However, recognising that parents may be unable to come into school, but want to be heard, the school has set up a dedicated telephone voicemail system for parents to make comments on, and suggestions for, school improvement. Additionally, the head teacher is usually at the school gate at the start and end of the day. Parents particularly commented on the better and increased dialogue between them and the school since the arrival of the present head teacher.
62. The school has a well-established and thorough selection process for pupils entering the school, particularly for the main entry at the beginning of Year 7. There are also effective pastoral links, particularly with the main contributory schools. For instance, pupils are invited to visit the school in the summer term to meet key staff and to become acquainted with the site. A small number of students also joins the school at other times, especially at the beginning of Year 12. They are quickly integrated into the school community.
63. Curriculum links with other schools are less extensive, but there are good examples. For example, the science department organises taster sessions for pupils while they are in Year 6; these are effective in providing a sense of excitement about investigative work and the facilities

at the school. Opportunities for pupils in primary schools to benefit from the school's resources and accommodation in other subjects are not yet as well developed.

64. There are very extensive links with the local community; these provide a very good contribution to the school curriculum. For instance, specialists from local industry help pupils in upper school to prepare for interviews, and there is good support for the personal, social and health education course. The industry days aimed at pupils in Year 10 invites members of local businesses to use their experience and knowledge to act as mentors, and to enhance pupils understanding of the world of work. Most pupils in Year 11 gain further benefit by taking part in a wide range of work experience opportunities during July. This relies heavily on the support provided by local employers; however, many pupils make a contribution to society in return, for example, in environmental work, or in schools and play groups.
65. Further valuable advice is provided by the school's careers' adviser. This includes support for a careers convention, which has established good links with a number of local universities. Personal appointments are available for pupils and parents. These appointments challenge students intellectually to make use of their potential, and help to raise their aspirations by providing details about courses suitable for their individual interests.
66. The school supports community activities well. It provides facilities for adult education classes each evening, and for meetings of local organisations. The school also holds an annual charity week when a large number of special events are organised to raise money for local needs. The school is justifiably proud of the totals raised each year.

Sixth Form

67. Information provided for parents is of the same very high quality as in the main school. The parents of students in Year 12 also receive an early interim report, which gives them an idea of how their son or daughter is settling into the courses chosen. The parents of any student who may, or should, be considering applying to Oxford or Cambridge are strongly encouraged to attend a special meeting at which they and their children are urged to raise their sights. Parents are asked to contribute their views in the same way as elsewhere in the school.
68. The school is exploring the use of consortium arrangements with other in order to broaden provision and choice. There has been limited take-up to date, but there is good co-operation between the schools, and improved arrangements are being prepared for September 2004.
69. There are very good community links, and the sixth form curriculum benefits significantly from the support of the local community. For instance, Year 12 students have established a Young Enterprise group with the help of a set-up grant from a local bank. Students are becoming acquainted with the process of developing a small business, and the problems of balancing income against expenditure. After initial support from their mentor at the bank, and encouragement from tutors in school, they are now beginning to run their own meetings, and make their own decisions about the future.
70. Further community support is provided for the general studies course. For example, members of the local Samaritans group visit school to talk to students about their work, and to encourage students to think about their role in the community. Students can also take part in The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, with its encouragement of personal development and service.
71. Students also receive information about becoming community volunteers; many students are showing interest in contributing to this venture. Students provide classroom help in a number of primary schools, and also make a major contribution to the school's fund-raising for local charities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. Governance and curriculum leadership are very good; management is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governors play a very full part in mapping the direction of the school's development, and have a clear picture of how well the school is doing.
- The headteacher and his senior colleagues provide very good leadership for the school, emphasising the needs of pupils as individuals.
- There are thorough systems for reviewing how well the school is working, involving a substantial amount of classroom observation.

But...

- The school does not fully meet requirements for collective worship.
- The leadership of modern languages is unsatisfactory, and the management of special educational needs, although satisfactory, could be improved further.

Commentary

Main school

72. The *governance* of the school is very good, and governors play a key role in determining the school's priorities, and holding it to account, making very good use of its committee structure. They have a wide range of expertise, and this is used to good effect, for example when drawing up the person specification for the headship; the governors had a clear picture of what they did, and did not, want from a new headteacher. Governors play a full part in determining the priorities for each school development plan through a development committee, and are enthusiastic supporters of the school's specialist science college bid. The governors think strategically, for example seeing how small scale redevelopments such as the new music block will allow further enhancement of facilities as part of a much larger premises plan.
73. Governors meet all statutory requirements placed upon them, except that the school's limited accommodation makes it impossible for them to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, although they ensure that as many assemblies as possible are held each week for pupils and students. They have a clear policy on matters of inclusion and equality, including up to date statements on race equality and disability, and receive regular reports on how well these policies are working.
74. The governing body has an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, for example in making sure that pupils with special educational needs are identified and supported fully. Progress reports on the school development plan form a standing agenda item at meetings, and, within the limits imposed by their other work, governors visit to see the school at work.
75. *Leadership* is very good overall, and is far from complacent, as it might be given the school's high examination results. The headteacher gives very good leadership. He has been in post for some four years, arriving in a school that had a strong academic tradition. He has been successful in sustaining this, whilst building up the pastoral side of the school, strengthening links with parents, and establishing a collegiate structure in which the leadership team works together very well, sharing his vision. This emphasises the needs of pupils as individuals; inclusion is good. His habit of making himself accessible to parents at the school gate before and after school emphasises his concern to know about the pupils and students, so that parents have direct access to the headteacher and can express any concerns. The leadership team also provides very good leadership. It has suffered the loss of some of its members through promotion to other schools, and through illness. Such is the commitment of the central

team, and the strength of the shared vision, that improvements have continued to be put in place, and the action points from the previous inspection, for example on curriculum matters, have been tackled well.

76. In the main school, curriculum leadership is very good overall. In most subjects it is at least good and has a positive effect on achievement. It is excellent in design and technology, and in citizenship, where much progress has been made in the recent past. It is very good in science, history, religious education, and in music. In art, it is satisfactory, but in modern languages, leadership is unsatisfactory. The leadership of special educational needs is satisfactory, but capable of being improved. The role of the co-ordinator in providing a professional lead to colleagues on special needs matters is not sufficiently clear.
77. The *management* of the school is good overall. There are thorough systems in place to monitor the work of subject and other teams, with a rolling programme of departmental reviews; not all subjects have yet been reviewed. This programme, and the good arrangements for performance management, means that some 350 observations of teachers at work take place each year. Together with work scrutinies and a wide range of other information gathering methods, the school thus has a clear picture of what it does well, and where it can improve. The self-evaluation carried out showed that the school had identified the same issues as the inspectors. Management focuses on raising the academic and personal development of pupils as individuals.
78. The school has the required policies in place, but some guidance, such as that for assessment, allows too much variability of practice. Procedures for the management of special educational needs ensure that the learning needs identified are shared with teachers, and that there is effective liaison with parents and external agencies. However, they do not provide clear guidance on how provision is to be made. Nor are there coherent systems for assessment, and for planning that identifies, and meets, the whole range of pupils' needs. Teaching and learning in subjects are not systematically monitored to ensure that targets contained in Individual education plans are being met. In other respects, the school is good at ensuring that it is an inclusive place, for example monitoring the results of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, boys and girls, or those for whom English is an additional language.
79. The school's finances are managed well. It is telling that, within a few days of a new Audit Commission Website becoming available, the school had used it to compare its patterns of income and expenditure against those of similar schools. Such comparison, together with the constant challenge to present methods from the governors' finance committee, ensure that the school demonstrates good best value practice.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,959,932	Balance from previous year	221,931
Total expenditure	3,854,015	Balance carried forward to the next	327,847
Expenditure per pupil	3,222		

80. The budget is well matched to the school's development priorities. The seemingly large carry-forward reflects the fact that the school is developing a new music block, and has also very recently undertaken substantial refurbishment of several areas.

Sixth form

81. The governors maintain a careful watch on the development of the sixth form, including possible partnerships with other schools to provide an even wider range of courses and learning styles. Although provision for religious education now meets statutory requirements, that for collective worship does not, for the same reasons as in the main school.
82. The leadership of the sixth form is very good; it has recently changed hands, but already, the new head of sixth form has shown that she has a firm grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the area, and is now preparing plans to improve provision further. For example, a Year 12 team building day has been introduced, and a member of staff has been trained in psychological techniques to raise further the achievement of male students. There are plans in hand to move to more varied styles of teaching and learning. Unusually, given the size of the sixth form, the current post-holder is not a member of the senior team.
83. The management of the sixth form, including financial aspects, is good. Courses are monitored to ensure that they are educationally and financially viable. The recently completed review of sixth form teaching has used data analysis well to focus on the issue of underachievement by boys. The size of the sixth form allows a very good range of advanced courses to be offered, and partnerships are being explored to widen the range further. As in the main school, there are areas where policies and procedures could be tightened further to focus even more on the achievement of individuals, but the sixth form runs smoothly at a day to day level. There is a good flexibility of approach and an evaluative culture.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils reach 2ell above average standards in national tests and examinations at the ends of Years 9 and 11.
- Good, and sometimes very good, teaching leads to good achievement overall.
- Very good marking gives pupils very good guidance on how to improve.

But...

- The progress of some low attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 could be improved.

Commentary

84. Standards at entry are high. Standards in national tests in Year 9 in 2003 are very high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. This is similar to the position in 2002. The school's results are in line with those of similar schools nationally. Although girls do better than boys, the gap is narrower than that seen nationally. Standards in GCSE English and English literature examinations in 2002 and 2003 are also very high in comparison with national figures. The results are well above those that would be expected from the pupils' Year 9 test results two years earlier
85. Standards of work seen are well above average for the end of Year 9. With final "polishing" before the tests, this is consistent with recent test performances. Achievement is good. The pupils' standards of speaking and listening, and of reading, are well above average. High attaining pupils write expressively and accurately. A few lower attaining pupils at the start of Years 7 and 8 do not develop their writing at sufficient length, do not always use formal language appropriately and show some inaccuracies in spelling and punctuation. These pupils are identified and supported appropriately. By the end of Year 8 they are making good progress. High attaining pupils are well stretched and their achievement is good. Standards are well above average for the end of Year 11, and achievement is good. Pupils of all levels of attainment express themselves clearly, adapting their use of language appropriately to their audience and purpose. Their reading of literary, non-fiction, and media texts shows very good understanding of nuance and writers' intentions. They organise their writing coherently with increasing precision, accuracy, and fluency.
86. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good. Lessons are very well planned and structured and pupils are extended by a range of varying activities. Teachers communicate learning objectives clearly, so that the pupils know what is expected of them. They start lessons with a brisk activity that quickly focuses the pupils' attention and alerts them to topics that will be explored later. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' independent work and homework is used effectively, either to reinforce learning or as preparation for the next lesson. As a result, pupils' learning progresses quickly. For example, Year 9 pupils reading an anthology of short stories by Janni Howker contributed well to a discussion on differing perspectives of women in the story *The Topiary Garden* as a result of their homework preparation. They were then extended by being challenged to prepare a new edition of the anthology: a task that ensured that they had to re-read critically; select, organise, and prioritise their ideas and argue a point of view coherently. Where teaching is less effective, some writing tasks need to be demonstrated more clearly. In some lessons in Years 7 to 9, the teachers did not take enough notice of pupils'

previous learning, knowledge, and understanding. Teachers' marking is detailed and gives clear indications how to improve. Marking is always encouraging, but some teachers over-praise work from lower attaining pupils that could be better.

87. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are very good with examples of excellent teaching. Teachers demonstrate reading and writing skills very effectively, for example using an overhead projector to show how to read an information brochure critically, annotating key linguistic features. Teachers have high expectations and make frequent, helpful references to examination assessment objectives so that the pupils have a very clear idea of how to achieve well. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and tasks are planned to extend potential high achievers. For example, in Year 11 pupils were organised into small groups to critically evaluate different paragraphs in a World Wildlife Fund leaflet, and individual pupils were identified to collate and present their group's ideas to the rest of the class. They did so, clearly and confidently using annotated transparencies to exemplify.
88. Curriculum leadership is good. The head of English employs good strategies to monitor teaching and learning and pupils' progress. Pupils who need additional help with basic skills, for example in spelling or the use of grammar and punctuation, are identified and supported well for a concentrated period of time in small groups. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have either been maintained or are better. The monitoring of pupils' progress has improved; pupils are given good, planned opportunities to use ICT; there is good encouragement and opportunities for pupils to use the school library and widen their reading.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

89. Standards of speaking and listening, reading and writing are well above average. Support for pupils' literacy is good overall, but this is not always consistent within subjects. All teachers have received in-service training in developing pupils' literacy skills, and there is a shared marking policy for the correction of spelling, grammar and punctuation which most, but not all, teachers follow. Most subjects reinforce the vocabulary and specialised terminology of their subject well. Pupils who need support for basic literacy skills are identified by the English department. This information is communicated to all other teachers, and the pupils receive additional, concentrated support in small groups. In a few cases, pupils, often lower attaining boys, do not write at length as well as they could, leading to lower than expected examination performance.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school enables all pupils to study at least two languages.
- There is a lot of good practice in the teaching.

But...

- Leadership of the subject overall is unsatisfactory; there are no systematic strategies to meet its development needs.

Commentary

90. In the 2002 GCSE in languages, results were significantly above average. Results in 2003 are similar. The gap between the results of boys and girls is narrower than nationally. The school's strategy that lets the best linguists take one language at GCSE at the end of Year 10 is justified by the high percentage of A* or A grades obtained. Almost all pupils who began Spanish in Year 10 gained a higher grade with a third of them gaining grade A* or A. Results for 2003 broadly match those of the previous year.

91. By the end of Year 9, standards observed during the inspection are above average for both boys and girls. Achievement is good overall because pupils also reach this level in the second language they begin in Year 8. Standards are well above average in writing in both languages. By Year 9 there are examples of continuous writing enriched by phrases not usually found at this level. This reflects the teachers' focus on knowing, and meeting, the criteria for higher GCSE grades. Listening skills are also above average because teaching is largely in the foreign language. Pupils become accustomed to the intonation and seldom have difficulty in understanding. The variety of activities, games and songs used at this level result in confident speaking skills. As a result, pupils have easy recall of the work from earlier learning.
92. By the end of Year 11 standards are above average. Pupils' writing is very good and benefits from the teachers' experience in examinations. This is the factor that makes achievement good, by raising standards from those seen in lessons to the results in examination. Where writing is less accurate, pupils still communicate clearly. The oral work of the express group in German is well above average and pupils show a fluency and confidence more appropriate to sixth form study. By contrast, pupils in two other German groups lack confidence because the teaching does not challenge them in speaking.
93. Overall, teaching and learning are good, and very good in Years 7 to 9. However, there is some unsatisfactory teaching in German. Where the teaching is good, teachers have high expectations of both work and behaviour. In oral and written work they demand 'that little extra' to raise it to a higher level. In these lessons teaching is almost exclusively in the foreign language and pupils develop good listening skills. In the earlier years the variety of activities make oral work fun. This creates positive attitudes and confidence in speaking, so that pupils want to participate. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, there is an over-emphasis on the content and on writing, and pupils become passive learners. In general, homework is set and marked regularly with helpful comments. The best marking seen would serve as a model for all teachers of the subject. Pupils are regularly assessed to National Curriculum levels, but these are not fully explained to pupils in order to help them understand their attainment, so that staff could set subject-specific targets. There are good examples of work with ICT but at present, schemes of work do not guarantee its use with all pupils.
94. The leadership of the department as a whole is unsatisfactory, although routine management is satisfactory and teaching is monitored appropriately. The head of department does not identify a clear vision for the strategic development of the subject. Many issues for improvement have been identified, but there are no clear priorities and no structured programme to address any of them. However, across the subject as a whole, improvement since the previous inspection has been good because of good work by the team as a whole. Standards by Year 9 have improved, there are now schemes of work in place, and the department has better resources.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improving test and GCSE results are now very high in comparison with national averages.
 - Teachers have a confident grasp of examination requirements to support the pupils' revision.
 - The provision for literacy is good, and pupils' literacy skills are well supported and developed.
- But...
- Teachers could still match work to pupils' needs more precisely.
 - Provision for ICT is unsatisfactory and the use of computers is limited for some teaching groups.

Commentary

95. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, results were very high, in the top five per cent, in comparison with national figures. Results have remained very high in recent years, rising in line with improving national trends. In the 2003 GCSE examination, results were very high in comparison with national averages and very high in comparison with similar schools based on their prior attainment. Pupils tend to do better in mathematics than their other subjects. Higher attaining pupils also take GCSE statistics and the 2002 results, the latest for which national comparisons are available, show results to be significantly above average. The 2003 results in statistics were similar to those in 2002.
96. On the evidence of pupils' work and lessons observed, standards in mathematics are well above average for the ends of Years 9 and 11. Standards are set to improve further as a result of staff expertise in setting and marking external examinations, as well as the department's focus on revision papers and examination practice. The standards seen in statistics are similar to those in the examination. Achievement is good in all years, although progress is sometimes less rapid in Year 7, where there is too much repetition of work already covered in the pupils' primary schools. Number and algebra work is well developed and, by the end of Year 9, pupils can use Pythagoras' theorem to calculate the lengths of the sides of a right angled triangle, while higher attaining pupils manipulate algebraic indices and calculate arc lengths and sector areas with confidence. By the end of Year 11, pupils identify upper and lower bounds as well as use the sine and cosine rules to solve non right-angled triangles.
97. The provision for literacy is good and pupils' literacy skills are well supported and developed. Subject specific words are suitably emphasised and the department places considerable importance on technical vocabulary and correct notation. The provision for ICT within the department is unsatisfactory. The department makes good use of graphical calculators but other provision is underdeveloped and access to computers is limited for some teaching groups.
98. Teaching and learning are good overall. Lessons start promptly so pupils are quickly engaged and focused. Teachers are very knowledgeable and have a confident grasp of examination requirements so that the teaching is carefully mapped to examination requirements. Teachers enjoy positive and supportive relationships with their pupils and give their time freely outside lessons to support pupils. However, in too many lessons, teachers talk too much, and matching work to individual pupils' needs could still be better so that the most able pupils are challenged with work which broadens pupils view of mathematics. Homework builds well on the work of the lesson and marking is regular, but inconsistent across the department
99. Curriculum leadership is good. There is a clear educational direction for mathematics and a commitment to improvement. The head of department has a good awareness of the strengths of the department as a result of his informal monitoring. However, this monitoring is not sufficiently rigorous to identify individual weaknesses and share good practice. Schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed to provide a framework for short and long term curriculum planning.
100. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards and teaching have improved, but marking remains inconsistent. The provision for literacy remains good but there has been only limited improvement in the provision for ICT.

Mathematics across the curriculum

101. Standards of numeracy are well above average. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is good. All members of staff have received training in the use of numeracy, and each department has an assigned mathematics teacher to support their work. Number work is developed well in science for work on standard form, although pupils rely too heavily on their calculators, for example to calculate $5 \times 5 \times 5$. Spatial awareness is use well in gymnastics,

and measurement skills are consolidated in geography. Pupils make good use of proportion and scale in art. Data handling skills are seen extensively across the curriculum with good use made questionnaires in design and technology, and rank correlation for field work in geography.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum leadership is very good, leading to very good teamwork.
- The monitoring of the work of the department is increasing, so that strengths are acknowledged, and weaknesses addressed.
- Teaching is good overall; teachers develop good relationships with pupils.
- The use of ICT is well developed, resulting in added interest.

But...

- Pupils could use their initiative more in some lessons.
- Some accommodation is sub-standard.

Commentary

102. Standards in national tests in Year 9 have normally been very high, but the average points score has fallen in each of the last two years; in 2003, results were well above average. Boys performed better than girls, but the gap is closing. In 2002, GCSE results were also well above average. Pupils' achievements were good compared with their results when in Year 9. However, pupils did less well than in most of their other subjects. In 2003, there was an increase in the proportion of A* and A grades.
103. On entry to the school, standards are well above average. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' achievements are good, and standards remain well above average for Years 9 and 11. Work is challenging and pupils develop good learning habits from the start of Year 7. However, there is less rigour in Year 9 where a small minority of pupils, both boys and girls, develops a casual attitude to learning, and their achievements as a result are only satisfactory. Teachers provide insufficient differentiation of tasks in Year 9 to cater for the wide range of aptitude of these pupils, including those with special educational needs. In Years 10 and 11, achievement improves again, and is generally good.
104. Teaching is good overall, and very good in Years 10 and 11. The teachers work hard, they have a very good command of their subject, and the planning of lesson objectives is thorough. However, less time is devoted to devising interesting strategies for learning, to using a variety of teaching methods, and to involving pupils in their learning. Pupils are over-dependent on their teachers, for example when recording the results of practical work. They are not sufficiently encouraged to use their initiative, and to think about what *they* could do to improve their work. Marking is mostly good, with some excellent advice about how to improve. Teachers' management skills are generally good, but in Year 9 in particular there is a lack of humour and expertise in managing the small minority of pupils who make challenging comments, and who are reluctant to concentrate. There is inconsistency in the use of the three-part lesson, but many teachers use key words effectively to help pupils to learn. Teachers are skilled also in the use ICT to add interest to their lessons. They have been quick to realise its potential in improving learning opportunities.
105. Curriculum leadership of the science department is very good. Schemes of work are detailed and include references to using computers and improving literacy skills. There are very regular meetings; these help to develop effective teamwork, enable teachers to share expertise, and lead to consistency in practice. However, there is insufficient liaison with the mathematics department to develop consistency in the use of mathematical terms and concepts. There is

detailed analysis of examination data, but teachers are not yet using this information to develop strategies for learning. Most of the laboratories are of good quality, but a minority needs refurbishing.

106. Since the previous inspection, the department has made good progress overall. The quality of teaching has improved significantly, apart from the small minority of lessons for which planning is cursory. Priorities are well documented in the development plan, and pupils' investigative skills are improving. Teachers are well qualified, and there is a good balance of experienced and more recently qualified teachers. As a result of these changes, achievements are mostly good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9
- Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good.

But...

- The assessment data gathered on individual pupils are not used well enough to plan some lessons.

Commentary

107. Standards in the teachers' assessment for pupils in Year 9 in 2003 are very high. In the full GCSE examination in 2002 standards are very high. Similar results were achieved in 2003, although boys did not do quite so well as girls. Standards in the GCSE short course, completed at the end of Year 10 in 2003, are likely to be below average. All pupils took an examination the short GCSE course when they were in Year 9, and their marks were very high. Unfortunately, their coursework, entered when they were in Year 10, was of a below average standard. Pupils did not enter assignments on time and progress was inhibited by an unsatisfactory timetable for ICT in Year 10. In 2002 pupils reached higher standards in GCSE ICT than they did in other subjects. These results represent a very good improvement since previous inspection.
108. Pupils enter the school with above average knowledge and skills in ICT and reach well above average standards at the end of Year 9, making their achievement good. All pupils can create high quality documents in a range of styles for different audiences. They refine and develop designs for commercial applications, choosing the most appropriate software for the tasks. Standards in the current GCSE Year 11 are well above average. Overall, both boys' and girls' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Teachers ensure that students understand the coursework requirements, setting firm deadlines, and giving clear criteria for improvement.
109. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers often have excellent or very good knowledge of the subject, which they communicate to the pupils with enthusiasm. Lessons have a good pace and the careful planning ensures that pupils have access to good quality resources and information which they use to develop their knowledge and skills. Pupils respond with interest and learn well because their concentration and application is very good. In a very good Year 9 lesson, the teacher assessed the pupils' knowledge of graphics programs and gave them the criteria to choose the best software for designing a logo. The teacher then monitored their progress carefully, throwing in a fresh challenge at regular intervals. By the end of the lesson, all pupils had gone well beyond the original objectives. In less successful lessons, the teacher does not take enough account of the pupils' prior achievement. In these cases groups of pupils, for instance boys, higher attainers or those who are less motivated, are not set appropriately demanding tasks. In Years 7 to 9, teachers do not regularly set individual targets linked to National Curriculum levels. In the GCSE groups, teachers use this type of

assessment more effectively because it is linked to the coursework requirements and test marking, which the pupils understand. Whilst pupils get a sound idea of how well they are doing using exam information on the school Intranet, not all teachers regularly update pupils on their progress or set shorter-term individual targets.

110. Leadership in ICT is good. Improvements to the curriculum, teaching, learning and resources since the previous inspection have enabled standards to improve dramatically. Most curriculum areas now make good or very good use of ICT, especially in Years 10 and 11. Information and communication technology is used extensively, for instance in design and technology, art, geography and English, to support learning on the GCSE courses. In science, excellent use is made of the interactive whiteboard for exciting demonstrations. However, the use of ICT in mathematics is unsatisfactory. The ICT curriculum will be further enhanced next year, because pupils in Year 9 will complete the GCSE short course in this academic year. The library now provides a very good resource centre, with its online catalogue accessible anywhere on the network. Further developments are planned to improve access to ICT, for example in mathematics and history. Overall, the subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

111. The pupils' standards in ICT are well above average for the ends of Years 9 and 11. At each stage, pupils are capable of making informed choices from a wide range of software and using it expertly to communicate their ideas to different audiences, to simulate commercial processes, to explore patterns and relationships or to produce exciting images and designs. In nearly all subject areas, learning is enhanced using computers and other equipment such as computer aided design and manufacture, sensing and measuring apparatus or digital technology. Pupils are adept at locating Internet resources and using them well to extend their research. Girls and boys do equally well, although girls tend to be more methodical in their approach and do better in examinations. The school provides good ICT opportunities for gifted and talented pupils, with an Internet team, a programming club and open access to computers at most times during and after the school day, so that these pupils achieve at an appropriately high rate.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good because pupils have good attitude to learning.
- Pupils gain well above average GCSE results because they are well taught.
- Learning is enriched through fieldwork opportunities.

But...

- Teachers do not always use assessment data well enough to meet the needs of all pupils of different attainment.

Commentary

112. Results in the 2002 GCSE examination were well above average, with more than half of the large entry gaining A* or A grades. The results are consistent with those obtained in recent years. Boys did better than girls. Pupils tended to do better in geography than in their other subjects.

113. Pupils enter the school with above average standards in geography. By the end of Year 9 standards are well above average and represents good achievement. Pupils have good map skills, such as understanding about different map projections and how they are used to show information. They know about the formation of earth structures at a much earlier age than is usually seen. A minority of lower attaining pupils, however, finds difficulty in understanding the concepts that underlies these studies. Pupils understand how physical surroundings influence human activity and become increasingly aware of moral issues about the need to safeguard the environment. In studies about the Peak District National Park for example, pupils were well able to appreciate the views of different interest groups and write well-structured, evaluative accounts. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average and this represents good achievement for this group of pupils. Pupils have an extensive range of geographical terms and use them in appropriate contexts. Knowledge and understanding of physical processes, such as how ice shapes the landscape, is impressive with well-explained answers. The minority of pupils however, does not use examples sufficiently to support theoretical study. Pupils understand weather systems over the British Isles and are able to describe weather patterns, but understanding about physical processes occurring at frontal systems is insecure for the minority of pupils. Standards in GCSE coursework of Canterbury are exceptionally high with excellent use of ICT to research and present assignments.
114. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good. Pupils are taught by specialist teachers and they achieve well as a result. The aims of lessons are clear and pupils are actively engaged in learning but, lesson planning does not consistently meet the different needs of all pupils, particularly with more demanding tasks for the gifted and talented and support for lower attaining pupils. As a result occasionally, small numbers of pupils do not achieve well enough in the lesson. Teachers make very good use of resources. They stimulate interest and provide focus for learning and leads to many pupils making rapid gains. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is very good. Pupils make substantial gains in improving their examination skills because teachers are experienced and guide pupils carefully with detailed marking of work. Teachers expect much of pupils and set high standards. In GCSE coursework for example, pupils take much care in planning, researching and presenting work on Canterbury. The work is mostly of the highest quality, in particular the analysis of urban change and is enhanced through ICT. Lesson and homework tasks are usually common for all pupils and occasionally results in the minority of students not achieving high enough.
115. The curriculum leadership of the subject is good, as is its management. Development planning is sound with appropriate priorities identified. Planning is linked to whole school objectives and the detailed annual reviews by senior managers hold the subject to account. Results are evaluated and the outcomes built into future planning. The schemes of work are current but do not provide guidance about strategies to meet the needs of pupils of different attainment or how the subject will support the development of pupils' literacy and numerical skills. Satisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection with the subject maintaining the high performance of pupils evident in work seen.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is very good and learning is enriched by a very well planned curriculum.
- Marking is thorough and assessment data are used very well enough to track pupils' progress.
- Very good leadership and management are resulting in a continuing trend of improvement.
- There are no significant weaknesses in the subject.

Commentary

116. The school's GCSE results have been well above average over the last three years.
117. Standards at entry are average. Standards of work seen are well above average for the ends of Years 9 and 11. All pupils, boys and girls, the gifted and talented, and those with special educational needs, achieve well. Pupils have very good historical knowledge, understanding and skills. They make confident and critical use of historical sources showing a very good grasp of issues, and ability to link factors and events. Year 9 pupils for instance, engaged with enthusiasm in the analysis of pictorial evidence about the First World War challenging each other in making comparisons with the evidence they had recently seen in a film about the Battle of the Somme. Higher attaining pupils especially often make very insightful comments reflecting their ability to relate the topic being studied to a wider context. Written work is of very high quality with very good development of extended writing from Year 7 onwards. Essays are very well structured, fluent and analytical. GCSE course work is very well researched with significant strengths in detail, evaluation and explanation. Pupils work very well independently, and make good use of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
118. The high standards achieved reflect the very good teaching. The rapid progress made by Year 7 pupils shows that this has an immediate impact. Highly skilled planning ensures a very clear focus, pace and often an exciting range of learning opportunities. Clear authoritative presentations draw on very good subject knowledge. Very high expectations that pupils should work accurately as historians result in them working at full stretch. For example, Year 11 pupils worked at a very demanding level in analysing and comparing different accounts of the conditions faced by settlers in the American West. Group work is used very effectively to enable pupils to explore issues in depth, and ensure appropriate match of work. Probing questioning extends pupils thinking, but there times when they do not have enough opportunity to develop and explain their ideas fully in the context of whole class discussion. In very few lessons learning is too slow. Marking is very thorough and most provides very good guidance for improvement. Along with regular assessment, it ensures that pupils' progress is tracked very closely.
119. The very high standards reflect very good curriculum leadership. Management is also very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for provision for history and gives a very strong lead, keeping practice under constant review. He and the other history teachers are deeply committed to the achievement of excellence. Very good curriculum planning results in exceptionally broad learning opportunities. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection in improving standards and the quality of teaching and learning.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are well above average and among the best in the school.
 - Pupils show good achievement during their time in the school.
 - The good teaching results in good learning.
 - There is good support for the pupils' literacy to help them to write well structure responses.
 - Very good leadership has resulted in very good improvement since the previous inspection.
- But...
- Some teachers do not always use marking as effectively as they might to tell pupils what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

120. The 2002 GCSE results were well above average and among the highest in the school. The 2003 results show similar levels. Standards on entry to the school show a wide range, in the content covered in the many primary schools from which Year 7 pupils come. For this reason, standards on entry are judged as broadly average for, although the pupils take in information and express themselves fluently through reading and writing skills that are well above average, they do not always have the religious education background they need.
121. In work seen, standards by the end of Year 9 are above average, representing good achievement for all pupils, including those who have special educational needs. They reflect on difficult moral issues, and their discussion is productive, since they realise that opinion, if it is to be worth anything, must be based securely on evidence. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average in both the short course taken by all pupils, and in the full GCSE course. This, again, represents good achievement. Lower attaining pupils make good progress because teachers help them develop the structure of their writing. This approach really benefits all pupils; higher attainers also produce well-written answers, with relevant quotations effectively embedded in the text. This makes a strong contribution to examination success.
122. Teaching is good, overall. Teachers prepare challenging lessons well, and help their pupils develop a reflective approach to issues, and encourage pupils to think carefully. Time is used well in lessons, but the timed targets do not detract from an air of thoughtfulness, appropriate to the subject. There is some good, free writing, where pupils are encouraged to empathise with groups they have learned about, such as the extracts from the diary of a black child that they wrote after learning about slavery. The good teaching results in good learning, where pupils concentrate well, and understand that they need to know facts before they can express a sensible opinion and make up their own minds. Pupils say that they find their work relevant, interesting and enjoyable.
123. Assessment, including some self and peer assessment, is used well, and pupils can always describe the level at which they are working, and what they need to do to improve. Marking is very good in the work of most teachers but, in some classes, it does not play its full part in raising standards, and there are too few written comments that will help pupils to improve their work. Where there is evidence of good marking, especially in Years 10 and 11, pupils make good and sometimes very good progress.
124. The head of department provides very good curriculum leadership. An effective team of committed teachers has produced good documentation, which is effectively adhered to in the department's work. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Under-expectation characterised the work in religious education at that time; some 20 per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, the Year 10 and 11 course did not meet statutory requirements and activities were unchallenging. Teaching is now good, all statutory requirements are met, religious education is now firmly embedded in the core of the school's curriculum. The head of department and his team have taken the subject from a position of one of the weakest subjects in the school to a real strength.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership has raised standards and achievement.
- Very good assessment challenges pupils to improve their designing and making.
- High expectations from specialist teachers stimulate creative thinking, and promote an enjoyment of designing and making.

But...

- The lack of curricular links with primary schools limits planning at the start of Year 7.

Commentary

125. Overall GCSE results in 2002 are above average; resistant materials results are stronger than graphics. However data show that in the past, pupils did not perform as well in design and technology as they did in other subjects. In 2003 results have improved again; pupils are now doing much better in the subject.
126. Standards at entry are average. Work seen during the inspection shows that designing and practical work is steadily improving. In Year 9, the pupils' work is of above average standard, illustrating good achievement. Revised schemes of work and good writing guides have tackled problems with designing; while very productive assessment builds on previous making skills so pupils are proficient with a range of materials and tools. There is insufficient use of 'smart' materials such as Kevlar and of shape memory alloys.
127. By Year 11, the increasing sophistication of pupil's ideas, creative thinking and accurate making result in work that is well above average and achievement that is very good for the pupils concerned. Informative assessment prompts and organisational charts keep pupils on track through their final project. Portfolios reach very high standards. Effective use of computer-aided design and computer aided manufacturing processes add a professional touch to pupils' final products. Attendance problems in 2002 have improved because department strategies have helped pupils cope with the demands of GCSE. Pupils with individual education plans have targeted support, as do pupils with English as an additional language, enabling them to match the work of their peers. Although teachers plan extension work for higher attainers, gifted and talented pupils do not have links to other schools' gifted pupils, higher education or industry.
128. Teaching across Years 7 to 11 is very good with elements of outstanding teaching in Year 9. Very good planning uses individual assessment and marking to ensure all pupils know what they must do to improve. Teachers guide pupils to reflect on National Curriculum levels, which further motivates improvement. Teachers' knowledge of their subject stimulates high-level thinking and problem solving at the start of lessons so that pupils are active participants in their learning. This gives lessons an electric atmosphere of enjoyment and challenge. Teachers collaborate formally and informally. A high expectation of behaviour and work ethic has a very good impact on learning. Teaching features for improvement identified during the inspection were instantly modified.
129. Subject leadership is excellent. Since 2000 results have been consistently improving. The use of effective monitoring and feedback of teaching is consolidating and sharing good practice. The department's systems reflect whole school issues and ensure that policy becomes practice, without neglecting local and national subject initiatives. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good as all issues raised have been tackled successfully, and many improvements made.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Resources for ICT are good and pupils use computer imagery creatively.
- The department has improved well from the time of the previous report, particularly in the quality of teaching.

But...

- Assessment and marking do not tell pupils enough about their standards or how to improve.
- The lack of tracking and monitoring of pupils' achievements means that some underachieve.

Commentary

130. The GCSE results in 2002 were well above average compared with all schools. Pupils' results were significantly below those that they gained in their other subjects. The results for 2003 were similar.
131. Pupils enter Year 7 with very good spatial awareness and above average basic skills in art. They show satisfactory achievement between Years 7 and 9; standards are still above average at the end of Year 9. This is an improvement from the previous inspection. Skills develop satisfactorily, so pupils' mark-making using two-dimensional media is good. They also apply these skills well in the embellishment and decoration of three-dimensional artefacts. By Year 9, pupils' creative use of ICT is also above average. Their sketchbooks, which were criticised in the last report, now form a satisfactory record of pupils' learning.
132. Numbers entering for GCSE have increased. Those taking the subject at this level are generally not drawn from the highest attaining group of pupils in the school. Standards in Year 11 are above average and pupils have again made satisfactory progress in the development of skills from their earlier standards in Year 9. Their use of ICT, however, is much better. Pupils' coursework folders include imaginative manipulations of many images, usually ones they have created themselves. They also use digital cameras well for this work. Pupils of all prior attainments achieve satisfactorily, often through extra-curricular provision to boost their standards before final submissions. The proportion of pupils whose work matches A* and A grades is lower than expected in similar schools, reflecting the lower entry profile for the subject in Year 10. The achievement of this minority needs to be monitored carefully.
133. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. This represents a significant improvement from the previous report. Teachers' subject knowledge is mostly good. The level of challenge in lessons and projects is satisfactory, with time and resources used appropriately. Teachers use ICT well to promote good learning in this area. Pupils' understand ideas quickly and their compliant attitudes generally mean that they settle to work effectively. Marking and assessment are not good enough to provide pupils with detailed advice about what to do to improve work. Achievement and progress are not tracked satisfactorily, so under-achievement is not spotted or rectified early enough. Year 11 pupils are very uncertain about how good their work is in relation to GCSE criteria, or whether they are doing well enough.
134. Curriculum leadership is satisfactory. The prolonged absence of the subject leader recently was detrimental, but the department has now stabilised. Management of the subject at whole-school level has identified weaknesses and recent staff training has been useful. Investment in ICT has had good effects on the standards and quality of this aspect of pupils' work. The department's use of assessment data and information is weak. The previous report identified many significant weaknesses and the department has made good improvement to a satisfactory position now.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils reach well above average standards in GCSE examinations.
- Good curriculum leadership ensures consistency of experience and progress for the pupils.
- There is good curriculum enrichment opportunities and a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development.

But...

- There is a need to continue to encourage pupils to consider the physical and theatrical, rather than literary, interpretation of scripts.
- Some teaching is limited by inappropriate accommodation.

Commentary

135. Standards in GCSE examinations are well above average. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are also above average. Pupils' speaking and use of voice is well above average. Their movement is well controlled and disciplined. They work well, collaboratively and co-operatively. In addition, individual pupils in Years 10 and 11 take on directorial responsibility well. Achievement is satisfactory, but is sometimes restricted by pupils not considering the physical possibilities of theatre sufficiently well.
136. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers communicate learning objectives clearly. Drama skills, techniques and terminology are reinforced well and there is good demonstration by the teacher or by using pupils. Lessons are well structured and well paced. Pupils are encouraged to experiment and to evaluate what they have learned for themselves. Where teaching is less effective, there needs to be a tighter, more manageable focus within the time available, and pupils need to be encouraged to extend the evaluation of their performance.
137. There is good curriculum leadership. Schemes of work ensure consistency of experience across classes and give helpful guidance to less experienced teachers. There is a good improvement plan based on the clear identification of strengths and weaknesses. The subject contributes well to pupils' social and cultural development and there are good extra-curricular opportunities to participate in productions and to visit professional performances. Pupils also benefit from technological opportunities by using computer-assisted lighting. There is a well-equipped drama studio and there are plans for an additional studio. The additional studio is needed because the current use of a classroom restricts pupils' physical performance. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Music

The provision for music is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning lead to good achievement.
- The vision of the new head of department provides a clear focus on raising standards.
- The very good assessment strategies contribute to effective learning.

But...

- There is need to develop the instrumental provision in the school to help raise standards.
- Tasks are not always matched well enough to the needs of pupils of all abilities.

Commentary

138. Standards in the GCSE examination have been well above average in recent years.

139. Standards on entry are broadly average when compared to similar schools. Pupils make good progress so that by the end of Year 9, standards of work seen are above average. This represents good achievement and reflects the good progress pupils make in Years 7 to 9. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average, representing good achievement. Pupils with special needs, and higher attainers, make as good progress as others in music lessons. Pupils throughout the school have good musical vocabulary and can discuss music using the appropriate terminology. In a Year 7 lesson pupils composed effective rhythmic accompaniments to a melody working well in pairs and groups. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils could confidently discuss changing the character and mood of a melody using the elements of music and apply the techniques confidently in their own compositions. Pupils in Year 11 lesson could competently perform and improvise a reggae arrangement building up the accompaniment from bass line, rhythm, chords and melody. They worked in groups to compose their own reggae choruses.
140. Teaching and learning are good, with planning and assessment being particular strengths. Lessons begin with very good starter activities designed to challenge and engage pupils. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, pupils were given group tasks; whilst one group set up the drum kit and electric guitar correctly, others were matching definitions of different types of jazz styles to their correct genre. Lessons are characterised by good pace, a variety of pupil activities and the sharing of teaching and learning outcomes. A variety of learning materials and resources are used and include PowerPoint presentations, computer technology and DVDs. High standards of behaviour are expected and pupils work well as individuals, pairs and in groups collaborating productively on tasks. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly; there are particularly effective lesson starters such as echo clapping rhythms, building up rhythmic and vocal ostinati as accompaniment to call and response phrases by the teacher help focus pupils on musical activities. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils were divided into groups and given a variety of starter tasks such as setting up the drum kit and electric guitars correctly, whilst others opened envelopes that contained key words and their definitions to be matched up. Tasks that closely match pupils' capabilities are still under-developed in the department. Assessment is a strength of the department and pupils have clear task expectations and criteria for assessment. Composition and performance reports are completed and effective record keeping strategies have been developed.
141. Leadership is very good. A strength is the quality of planning and assessment coupled with the effective use of ICT to enhance learning opportunities for pupils. Clear direction for improvement has been identified and strategies to empower changes have been instigated. The pupils' literacy skills are well developed and they show good understanding of and can identify key musical concepts.
142. The department has made sustained and good improvement since the last inspection and, although accommodation is still unsatisfactory at present, work starts early in 2004 to build new facilities. The lack of instrumental provision is still a concern and the new head of department is actively developing this much needed provision to enhance the pupils' learning and the growing extra curricular work of the department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in examinations are high for the school's first GCSE group.
 - Departmental consistency promotes very good attitudes and behaviour.
- But...
- Poor accommodation and curriculum anomalies constrain achievement in indoor games.

Commentary

143. National data for 2003 are not yet available but figures suggest that results for the school's first GCSE results in the subject are likely to be high compared with other schools. Pupils tend to do better in physical education than in the other subjects that they take; boys outperform girls at the highest levels.
144. When pupils enter the school, standards are average. In work seen, standards are average overall in games, gymnastics and dance by the end of Year 9, representing satisfactory achievement. Boys in the top set are skilful footballers; girls in mixed ability classes complete netball circuits well. By the end of Year 11, standards in core lessons are broadly average. They are average overall in games, and above average in trampolining. Whilst achievement is satisfactory, pupils do not do as well as they should because poor accommodation limits their progress in indoor games, and arrangements for ICT reduce access to physical education in Year 10, constraining continuity and progression in learning. Standards in examination classes are above average in Year 10, and well above average by the end of the course, representing good achievement. Scrutiny of work indicates that most pupils apply their knowledge and understanding very well by the end of Year 11. The highest attainers produce excellent work on fitness training. At all levels, oral skills are above average. Standards in competitive games are good in football, netball, tennis and cricket; a few individuals compete in other sports at national level. The school gained Sportsmark in 2003.
145. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils benefit from the teachers' good subject knowledge. Consistency promotes very good attitudes and behaviour. In the most effective lessons, teachers encourage all abilities; they explain clearly the focus of practical work; they use demonstrations and questions to extend pupils' understanding. Feedback on individuals' progress in relation to assessment criteria could be more explicit. In Years 7 to 9, learning is good where teachers encourage sustained involvement. For example, the teacher's enthusiasm inspired girls to refine their dances in Year 9. In some lessons that are no more than satisfactory overall, instructions are unclear, or teachers talk too much, limiting time for pupils to practise. To date, the use of assessment information to structure specific tasks to challenge high attainers, or to support those who find skills difficult, is embryonic. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils enjoy the subject. However, chatter and inattention sometimes limit the impact of teaching on learning in double lessons in Year 10. In examination classes, teaching and learning are consistently good. Detailed marking helps all abilities to improve their theory work.
146. Good curriculum leadership and good management underpin much of the very good improvement in the subject since the previous inspection. Standards are higher, teaching is never less than satisfactory, and take up for extra-curricular sport is better. Accordingly, the subject enjoys a much higher profile in the school under the new head of department.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The focus subject was business studies, but work in economics was also sampled. In recent years, the GCSE results in economics have been high, and the very able pupils who study the subject tend to do much better in it than in the others that they take. The Year 11 lesson seen in economics showed similar very high levels of competence. Pupils were well able to meet the high level of challenge posed in understanding complex notions about government expenditure and fiscal policy. Teaching and learning were very good, and pupils showed very good achievement.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high and achievement is good.
- Good teaching and learning provide effective questioning to extend most pupils' thinking.
- Pupils make good links between aspects of the subject.

But...

- The very highest attaining pupils are sometimes not stretched enough.
- The department needs better resources to enable teachers to work more efficiently.

Commentary

147. The 2002 GCSE results were well above average. Pupils gained similar grades to those in their other subjects. Results were better in 2003, with almost all gaining grade C or above. Higher grades matched those in similar schools, with girls doing particularly well.
148. Standards are also above average in Year 11 and likely to be well above average by the end of the year. This represents good achievement for the pupils concerned. Pupils - assimilate abstract ideas about business matters. They progress swiftly as they move through Year 10 and standards become more above average over time. Pupils also relate ideas - quickly, making secure connections between, for example, marketing, finance and resourcing aspects of the work they study. They retain information easily and can apply it in new contexts with much better than average understanding. Pupils of all prior attainments possess high underlying standards in literacy and numeracy, which enable them to achieve well in the subject. Pupils also take good notes from lessons- so that, even when handwriting script is weak, the content makes very useful revision material. The use made of ICT is -satisfactory.
149. Teaching and learning are good. Staff have very good subject knowledge, so can deal well with questions from pupils which are tangential to the area being studied. Well-planned lessons include a good variety of activities, keeping pupils interested and engaged in their learning. Teachers have a very effective questioning style, with the best practice keeping pupils consistently well focused on answering "why?" Not all lessons stretch the highest attaining pupils sufficiently, with planned "extension" tasks sometimes used merely to occupy those who write faster or finish earlier, rather than work offering higher intellectual challenge. The department makes virtually no use of teaching aids, such as overhead or data projectors. Teachers cannot, therefore, demonstrate sufficiently well the types of presentation that would help pupils themselves to develop better presentation of their own work. Pupils generally learn well, though, with assessment helping them satisfactorily in understanding how best they can improve their work.
150. Curriculum leadership is good. The faculty manager provides a very good model for teachers and pupils. Day-to-day administration of business studies has been delegated to a teacher in the department, thus providing a good professional development opportunity. The faculty leader has a very clear vision for the department. Performance data are well understood and used effectively to track pupils' progress and achievement.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are both excellent, leading to a clear commitment to raising standards.
- Citizenship lessons are having a very positive impact on the pupils' personal development.
- The curriculum in the subject is very well planned and meets the needs of the pupils.
- Teaching is good with many very good features. As a result, pupils achieve well and respond very positively to their lessons, and to other opportunities provided.
- There are no major weaknesses in the subject.

Commentary

151. Pupils' standards in citizenship are above average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11. All groups of pupils achieve well. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 demonstrate good knowledge of the institutions and functions of government and clear awareness of their rights and responsibilities as young citizens. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are able to justify their opinions about social, political and ethical issues orally and in writing, and they use their knowledge and skills effectively to research both local and world issues.
152. Teaching is good overall, with many very good features. Lessons motivate and engage all pupils in the class. Teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed to the subject and pupils respond very positively. Lessons are well planned and carefully linked to curriculum objectives, enabling pupils to demonstrate high levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils are encouraged to develop informed opinions and to challenge the opinions of others. In a few lessons, a small group of boys is slower to settle to their work than other groups of pupils. However, teachers work hard to ensure that all pupils participate actively in lessons. Apart from specific lessons, pupils are also provided with a very good range of opportunities to take part in school and community-based activities. All pupils, for example, take part in the annual charity week which raises large sums of money for charities chosen by them.
153. Curriculum leadership and management are both excellent. The high priority attached to its development by senior management and by the head of department reflects the aim of the school to educate its pupils as widely as possible. The subject has been introduced in a very effective manner. The curriculum is very well planned with distinct modules in PSHE (personal, social, and health education), economy, society and citizenship, and within other National Curriculum subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 study a GCSE in ethics, which incorporates the National Curriculum requirements for citizenship. Very good procedures are in place to assess and record pupils' achievements and to monitor the development of the subject across the school. Teachers work very well together as a team and there is a very clear commitment to raising standards and to ensuring that the subject is not taught within a vacuum but has a clear impact on pupils' personal development.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

Only courses for which there were five or more entries are shown in the tables below

Level 3 GCE AS level courses in 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	6	100	82	17	33	30	33
Business studies	10	100	89	20	32	36	35
Classical studies	12	100	95	50	50	45.8	42.3
English literature	5	80	94	20	38	28.0	38.9
French	7	100	85	43	35	42.9	34.9
Design and technology	8	100	89	13	32	36.3	35.7
Geography	11	100	88	46	36	41.8	36.3
History	5	100	92	0	37	28.0	37.8
Mathematics	10	100	74	40	34	35.0	31.3
Other sciences	8	100	83	63	32	42.5	33.4
Other social studies	20	90	83	20	33	32.0	33.6
Religious education	7	100	91	0	39	32.9	37.9

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses in 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	7	100	96	86	49	114.3	85.1
Biology	9	100	92	44	36	84.4	74.1
Business studies	43	98	96	40	33	80.5	76.5
Chemistry	14	100	94	71	46	91.4	81.1
Drama	25	100	98	56	42	92.8	82.9
Economics	14	100	96	93	46	110.0	83.1
English literature	76	100	99	67	44	96.3	84.3
French	11	91	96	46	46	81.8	83.0
General studies	135	96	90	47	29	82.8	69.3
Geography	35	100	97	43	41	80.6	80.9
German	11	100	96	36	44	81.8	82.1
History	36	97	97	47	41	78.3	81.2
Mathematics	35	100	93	69	52	101.1	84.7
Music	6	100	98	67	42	100.0	82.2
Other social studies	60	97	94	45	39	86.3	77.7
Physics	20	90	93	60	43	89.0	78.6
Religious studies	23	100	96	48	44	88.7	82.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature and French, but German was also sampled. In the 2002 A-level examination, results in German were in line with national averages and in line with expectations. One lesson in Year 12 was observed. There was good teaching, which challenged the students by the sustained use of German. The students' learning is good because they are prepared to participate in oral work. Some feel insecure with grammar but the standards observed show satisfactory achievement.

English

Provision in English is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students reach above average standards in AS and A-level examinations.
- Very good teaching leads to very good learning.
- Very good student guidance is based on effective assessment.
- There are no areas of significant weakness.

154. English literature is a popular A-level course chosen by a large number of students. Standards in examinations at AS and A-level are well above average and have been improving. Standards

in work seen are well above average. All students read with developing critical appreciation and organise and express their ideas coherently. High attaining students use language very precisely and analyse linguistic features perceptively using detailed textual references. Achievement by all students, male and female, is good. Students entering the sixth form with relatively low grades at GCSE show very good achievement. High attaining students are well extended. Students' communication skills are well above average. All students can read critically and show good understanding of challenging literature. They express themselves clearly and accurately in writing, organising their ideas very coherently. They speak confidently and can argue and support a point of view persuasively. All students use ICT to word process and edit their coursework and use the Internet for independent research. There is little evidence of application of number within the subject.

155. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have a high degree of knowledge and convey their enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are very well-planned and structured with a good variety of activities and learning styles leading to full student participation. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers have high expectations of students' independent study skills but also provide very good resources to support additional wider reading. Students' attention is focused and they are challenged from the start. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on the role of Desdemona in *Othello*, students were challenged at the beginning of the lesson to identify, compare and contrast twelve different quotations from the play. Their learning was then extended as they were introduced to contrasting comments by literary critics: overall, it was an effective demonstration of the complexity of characterisation and the need not to take a simplistic point of view. Students are given very good guidance through detailed marking of their work and teachers effectively reinforce and exemplify the examination assessment criteria.
156. Curriculum leadership is very good. The head of English manages a comparatively large team of well qualified teachers very well. The students' achievements are monitored effectively, and there are good systems to ensure that there is consistency of standards across nine different sixth form teaching groups. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

French

Provision in French is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Assessment and marking are used well to raise standards.

Commentary

157. In the 2002 A-level examination, results were broadly average. Students' results show satisfactory achievement and were in line with their other examination subjects. The results for 2003 show an improvement on 2002. In the 2002 AS examination, results were well above the average.
158. The standards of work in both Year 12 and Year 13 are in line with national averages, and students show satisfactory achievement. Students have good listening skills, which result from the sustained teaching in French. The small size of the group in Year 13 limits the interaction in speaking and this is a weaker skill. All students read with fluency but much pronunciation lacks an authentic accent. There is extended writing on a range of topics. Writing shows good style in the frameworks used and the variety of language. Much writing shows independent thinking and well supported opinions. Occasionally the desire to express an opinion exceeds their language capabilities. Students in Year 12 have bridged the gap to the demands of independent learning at this level. They are confident at speaking in open questioning and, in their preparation for topics, draft full replies to questions set. There are some weaknesses in grammar because the GCSE course work examination requires less focus on this. Students have very good

communication skills, which are enhanced by the demands of the subject. Good application of number and ICT skills are used well to support learning.

159. Teaching in the sixth form is good. All teachers challenge students through the sustained use of French. Staff use the foreign language assistant well to create additional opportunities for intensive oral work. Students benefit from the different styles and strengths of shared teaching. Planning reflects the teachers' experience of the examination and the criteria required for the higher grades. There has been a good analysis of students' needs and there is now a greater focus on developing language skills. Expectations are clear in the pace and requirement for independent work. Students' attitudes and study skills support their own learning. Teaching directs student to use the Internet for research. The students' work is regularly assessed. A strength of the teaching is some exemplary marking to explain errors and set clear targets for language and style.
160. The leadership of the subject is very good. The head of French sets a good example through her own commitment and her teaching. There has been a good analysis of students' needs. This has identified that the concentration on content has limited the time spent on the key skills, that support all language learning. The schemes of work have been totally re-written to give skills a greater focus. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are well above national averages and have improved since the previous inspection
- Teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements, which they share with students.
- Teachers give their time freely outside lessons to support students in their work

But...

- In some lessons, insufficient account is taken of the spread of ability
- Provision for ICT is unsatisfactory and students report too few opportunities to use ICT within or outside their mathematics lessons

Commentary

161. In the 2002 A-level examinations, results were well above average. The trend has been one of improvement, but results have fluctuated over the last few years. Boys' results are better than those of girls and boys do relatively better in mathematics than their other subjects. On the basis of their prior performance at GCSE, the results represent good achievement overall, and better for the higher attaining students. The 2003 A level examination results in mathematics were similar to those in 2002.
162. On the evidence of the students' work and the lessons observed, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above national averages and similar to those in the external examinations. Students can solve algebraic equations and use differentiation and integration with confidence. Higher attaining students following the further mathematics course can solve second order differential equations. On the basis of their prior attainment, students' achievement is good.
163. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good overall. Lessons start promptly so that students are quickly engaged in the work of the lesson. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and their exposition is clear and confident. They have a very good idea of examination requirements, which they share with their students. Revision exercises and past papers are used well to prepare students for external examinations. Teachers enjoy positive and productive relationships with their students and give their time freely outside lessons to

support those with difficulties. However, in too many lessons, teacher talk dominates the work and there is insufficient account taken of the spread of ability in classes to cater specifically for individual needs.

164. Curriculum leadership is good. There is a clear educational direction for mathematics in the sixth form with a variety of courses on offer including mathematics and further mathematics. However, there is less opportunity for those who do not achieve the higher grades at GCSE and wish to continue with mathematics to support their other subject choices. Monitoring is not sufficiently rigorous to identify and act upon weaknesses and ensure that effective action is taken to address these. Schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed to provide a framework for short and long term curriculum planning and ensuring coherence across the subject and other subjects.
165. The provision for literacy is good and students' literacy skills are supported and developed well in mathematics lessons. Students' folders demonstrate good presentation skills although some of the folders, especially those of boys, do not provide a useful vehicle for revision. The provision for ICT in the sixth form is unsatisfactory and students report too few opportunities to use ICT within or outside their mathematics lessons. Graphical calculators are well used especially for statistics calculations but enrichment opportunities, such as making use of the internet are under utilised.
166. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have improved since the last report and are now well above national averages. Teaching has improved but some teaching remains too narrowly focussed and does not sufficiently cater for the spread of ability in the class. The provision for literacy remains good, but there has been insufficient improvement in the provision for ICT.

SCIENCE

The focus subject was chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. Standards in biology are above average. Take-up of the subject has been rather low recently, but it is now increasing again. In a very good Year 13 practical lesson to investigate the contraction of muscle cells, students' manipulative skills were high. They were clearly interested in their work, and they discussed their results maturely. In physics also, standards are above average. Teaching is good. In a Year 13 lesson about interacting magnetic fields, there was a very good balance between theory and practical work. As a result, students developed a good understanding of the rules used to predict outcomes.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum leadership is very good; work is very carefully planned.
- Teachers have very good command of their subject; the work is covered in depth.
- Relationships with students are excellent, resulting in a sense of purpose in lessons.
- There is very good use of ICT to improve learning opportunities.
- There is a very good take-up for the subject in Year 12.

But...

- Other than practical work, there is insufficient involvement of students in the learning process.

Commentary

167. Students with a wide range of attainment in Year 11 are given the opportunity to study AS/A level chemistry. Nevertheless, overall standards are above average. The proportion of students

gaining A or B grades is also above average. Standards in the Year 13 A-level examinations in 2002 were well above average. Based on performance in the GCSE examination, school data indicates that students' achievements were good. There is no consistent difference between the results of male and female students, or in the results of students from ethnic minorities.

168. Overall take-up of the subject is increasing. It is excellent in Year 12, where there are three groups of students, totalling almost 50. There is a good balance of male and female students. All students are clearly enjoying the challenge of A-level work. They have excellent relationships with their teachers, and they appreciate the help provided, and teachers' approachability. As a result, they readily ask for additional help when in difficulty, and their achievements in work seen during the inspection were very good.
169. The quality of teaching is very good, and often excellent. Teachers demonstrate a very good understanding of their subject, and their work is very carefully planned. As a result, lessons start promptly, and there is very good pace and purpose throughout. Excellent teaching was seen in a Year 13 lesson about molecular shapes, and in a Year 12 practical lesson involving titrations. Teachers make efficient use of the 50minute lessons; even so, these are rather short for practical work. Teachers are very positive about using ICT to improve learning opportunities, both in lessons and for research. Above average communication skills are promoted by the effective use of key words in lesson objectives, and these are reinforced in lesson summaries. Students use these words to improve the quality of their recording of practical work for assessment. Most students also study mathematics, and their number skills are good. Additional help is provided where necessary, for example in the use of formulae, and standard form.
170. The marking of students' tests and of homework is thorough, and in the best examples good advice is provided about how to improve. Students know their target grades; they are encouraged to aim high and to think of these as minimum grades. The quality of students' routine notes in folders is good; they take pride in their work.
171. The head of department leads by example. She clearly enjoys her work, and conveys a keen interest in her subject. Curriculum leadership is very good. The scheme of work provides effective guidance for teachers, so that work is well planned, and very good progression develops. Marks from examinations are analysed closely to determine strengths in teaching, and areas for improvement, and whether students are doing well enough. The quality of teaching is also monitored regularly, leading to higher standards.
172. Since the previous inspection, there have been improvements in the recruitment of students, their attitude to learning, and therefore the standards of their work. Overall, there has been very good improvement in chemistry.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and overall achievement is good.
- Teaching and learning are very good
- There are no areas of major weakness.

Commentary

173. The school entered Year 12 students for the AS level ICT examination in 2003 and results are likely to be below average. However, standards seen in the current Year 13 are well above average. This represents good achievement and results from improvements to the teaching and the students' commitment. The school has now changed to a computing syllabus for A

level and standards in the current Year 12 are well above average. The students' achievement is good on this demanding course which is more technical and scientific than their previous experiences.

174. Teaching and learning are very good overall and sometimes excellent. The best teaching is characterised by excellent teacher knowledge, leading to involving and challenging tasks. During a highly theoretical lesson on data transmission, the teacher brought the subject to life with clear explanations and entertaining diagrams. She took care to reinforce the students' learning with regular practical exercises and built well on their very good knowledge of mathematics and of physics. The students themselves are often highly motivated and will reinforce their own learning with additional projects, for instance, writing computer programs of their own. They also use their high level of written English and communications skills well, for example taking notes and producing clear and well argued case studies or systems analyses. Teachers take care to assess individuals' achievement and have reinforced the practice of target and deadline setting to ensure that students keep up to date with their work.
175. The leadership of ICT in the sixth form is good. The innovations and improvements in the main school have fed through to the sixth form, so that the school has been able to set up new courses. Although the introduction of the advanced level courses was not managed well, monitoring and evaluation have been used to pinpoint the problems and training used to improve the provision. Standards have improved significantly since the previous inspection when standards on the previous course were average.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, psychology and religious education but history and ancient history were also sampled. In history, A-level results have been average over the last two years with students achieving as well as expected from their GCSE results. Standards are improving rapidly. Students currently in Year 13 are achieving well above average levels. In the one lesson seen very good teaching resulted in students showing very rapid achievement in understanding the complex events leading to the 1867 Great Reform Act. Students take ancient history as an AS course in Year 12. Standards in the 2002 examination results were average in terms of A-B grades, but above average for A-E grades. Teaching in the Year 12 lesson seen was good; students were challenged intellectually and responded well to questions about Octavian's actions after the Battle of Actium.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students reach very high standards because of very good teaching.
- The very good assessment and guidance leads to students being well informed about how well they are doing.
- Fieldwork standards are very high because teachers set rigorous targets and expect students to meet them.

But...

- More could be done to improve teaching and learning links with higher education.

Commentary

176. Results in the 2002 A-level examination were average with females attaining higher than male students did. The most recent results however, show significant improvement and are in line with previous well above average results. The 2002 results were due to significant minorities making poor attendance.

177. By the end of Year 13 standards are well above average. Students have depth of knowledge and clear understanding of topics. In studies of river basins in Year 12, they link physical and human factors very well in explaining issues about water supplies. They have very good research skills, particularly in using web sites and to present graphs and spreadsheets, and these are well demonstrated in work undertaken in Snowdonia, when they collected and analysed data to test hypotheses. This entails taking measurement and evaluating the results through equations to reach a conclusion. Students have good knowledge of global regions and theoretical study is linked to knowledge of specific places. In Year 12, for example, learning about global development issues is well supported through studies of economic and social change in Kenya and leads to improvement in the quality of analysis in assignments. Most students' writing is well organised and issues are developed sequentially, but a few assignments show insufficient reading around topics so that answers are not developed enough with evidence to support arguments.
178. Teaching is very good. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and this makes a significant contribution to the very good achievement that students make. Lessons are very well prepared and supported through a range of resources. These provide a clear focus for study and leads to students improving their knowledge and understanding of topics. The most effective lessons are characterised by teachers making high demands on students in effort and application. In a Year 13 lesson about deforestation issues, for example, initial rigorous questioning tested understanding of development terms and was followed by challenging activities that led to well informed discussion about conflicting interests about developments in Papua New Guinea. Marking of assignments is thorough with clear evaluation of the merits of the work so that students understand how to improve. This is successful, since written work shows that most students improve their essay writing skills as they progress through the course. Occasionally students are too reliant on the teachers for learning and not enough is expected of them and results in their making only satisfactory achievement in the lesson.
179. Curriculum leadership is good. The acting head of department is efficient and ensures that good communications are maintained with teachers through regular meetings and support. Students are well supported and their achievements closely monitored through established procedures for 'tracking' progress. The arrangements to engage students to assess their own performance are very good and lead to dialogue and understanding between teachers and students about learning needs. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The subject has significantly improved its results in recent years. Standards of work seen show that attainment is now well above average.

Psychology

The provision for psychology is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and have improved significantly over the last three years.
- Students achieve very well. They are very well motivated and enjoy psychology.
- Teaching is very good.
- The students' achievements are tracked very closely.
- There are no significant weaknesses

Commentary

180. The A-level results in 2002 were average, but students showed better achievement than expected from their GCSE results. The 2003 results are better. There has been a dramatic improvement in the numbers taking the subject and in the standards achieved over the last three years.

181. Students currently in Years 12 and 13 are also reaching well above average standards. Their knowledge and understanding of psychological research studies and methodology are very good. They are confident in engaging in practical experiments, and perceptive in their criticism of methodology. Year 13 students, for instance, questioned the usefulness of aspects of questionnaires on learning styles and the likely impact on the validity of findings. They readily use technical vocabulary. Written work is of high quality. Files are exceptionally well organised and provide a very valuable learning resource. Essays are very well structured, fluent, analytical and well argued drawing well on psychological theories and evidence to support points made. In a few cases, whilst knowledge and understanding are good, there are some weaknesses in its use in analysing and evaluating the reliability and validity of research. Learning is enhanced by the students' very good communication, application of number and ICT skills.
182. Teaching is consistently good. Wider evidence shows practice of very high quality, which consistently supports learning through tightly structured teaching, rigorous assessment and very well chosen learning resources. Achievement is constantly monitored and students are very well prepared for external examinations. Thorough marking, combined with self-assessment, results in students knowing exactly how well they are doing. Their understanding of psychological research theories, studies and principles benefits from clear presentations drawing on very good subject knowledge. Learning is constantly reinforced by practical experiments, video clips and group work, enabling students to explore issues in depth. Sometimes however, too long is allowed for these activities, thus slowing the pace of learning. The constantly high expectations that students should work accurately in analysing and evaluating research provides very good intellectual challenge. The use of Internet web sites to broaden research is strongly encouraged, and the CD-ROM text book produced by the head of department to meet the specifications of the syllabus is a significant strength in supporting learning.
183. The rapidly improving standards and very high quality of the teaching reflect very good leadership and management. The head of department gives a clear lead for the level of intellectual challenge to be provided, and works in close partnership with other teachers in ensuring the highest possible standards. Provision is kept under constant review with students involved in the process. The curriculum is very well planned to ensure interest and relevance. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection.

Religious education

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The A-level results are well above national average and students achieve very well
- Teaching is enthusiastic and challenging and motivates students to learn very successfully.
- Students cope very well with high levels of intellectual challenge.
- A-level religious education is a popular option choice and many students go on to study theology, philosophy and other related subjects at university.
- There are no areas of significant weakness.

Commentary

184. The A-level results were above average in 2002 and at a similar level in 2003. The AS and A-level courses are proving increasingly popular with students, and numbers in the current Years 12 and 13 have increased considerably.
185. Current standards in work seen are well above average in both Years 12 and 13. Students embark on sixth form religious education with a fairly wide range of previous attainment.

Students of all prior attainments achieve very well and, in many cases, exceed their expected grades based on their attainment at GCSE. Students show very good understanding and judgement in their critical analysis of texts. Communication skills are high. Essays show considerable depth of understanding; students write with confidence and express their views clearly. They participate well in discussion and debate. They respond very well to the increased challenge presented by original sources of information and the increased complexity of ideas studied in the sixth form. Students make good use of ICT to research scholarly articles and present some of their work. Standards in this area are above average.

186. Teaching and learning are very good. There are examples of excellence, particularly in the levels of intellectual challenge that students are expected to cope with. At the same time, teachers work hard to make lessons accessible and also enjoyable. As a consequence, students will, for example, read Thomas Aquinas and watch a clip from the movie *Seven* in the same lesson. Another strength of the teaching is the wide range of resources used to enhance the curriculum. The majority of students, for example, take part in the department's annual visit to Egypt. Students react to the enthusiastic and lively teaching with very positive attitudes and determination to succeed.
187. Curriculum leadership and management are both very good and mirror the situation found in the main school. Teachers are very enthusiastic and work very well together, showing a very high team ethos that means ideas and resources are energetically shared. Statutory requirements to provide religious education for all sixth form students, raised as an issue in the previous inspection, are now well met.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are improving and increasing numbers of students are taking A-level product design.
- Good assessment strategies quickly integrate pupils joining the school in Year 12.
- There is valuable, contrasting expertise of teachers supporting the A-level course.

But...

- There are limited links to industry to extend experiences.

Commentary

188. Students have open entry to AS design and technology. In 2002, results are below average at grade B and above, but above averages at grade E or better. Unsatisfactory attendance from several boys had an adverse effect on completion of their portfolios and practical work, which led to disappointing examination results by these students. Some students who joined the school in Year 12 took time to integrate and fully understand the demands of A-level work. There were no A-level examination entrants in 2002. However in 2003 the first group took A-level, and a larger group took the AS course; results have improved. Retention of students has been good. Standards of communication, number and ICT are above average, and are used well, being woven into design assignments.
189. Standards are well above average. Three teachers successfully cover different elements of the course. This arrangement is having a good effect on course work. In a Year 13 lesson with one teacher, students explored innovation and went on to do a product analysis of two types of vacuum cleaner. The exercise clarified the meaning of innovation that uses lateral thinking to respond to human need. These students then went onto the computer room to work on their product study with a different teacher. Students discussed plagiarism and the importance of referencing, bibliographies and footnotes to their study. Students explained the variety of

teachers enriches their experience. Overall, female students achieve at a better rate than their male colleagues. Male students struggle to collect primary research for use in developing ideas and meeting deadlines. In Year 12, students who have come from a graphics background have some difficulty in conquering the resistant material skills needed to produce prototypes and final pieces. Students have a good understanding of current industrial production methods but industrial visits are limited. Students use computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing techniques to produce high quality products.

190. Teaching and learning are very good. The breadth of staff knowledge and use of assessment for developing learning helps most students to work hard, and to achieve very good results. By Year 13 teaching has challenged the students' thinking and creativity. They are confident in their skill and will take risks in their designing. Teachers have encouraged students to work on products of personal interest, which is bringing the designing and making to life because students are dealing with real problem solving. This has been an improvement on last year's design solutions. For example one product study is researching alternatives to block toes on ballet shoes; as a ballet dancer, the student understands the problem well, and is enjoying searching for a solution. Teachers and students' assessments run concurrently to ensure there is a check on the stage and rate of development of students work.
191. Leadership in the subject is very good. Teaching and learning are monitored carefully, and this results in relevant changes to the teaching scheme. A thorough end of year examination report reflects on results and changes that need to be made for improvement. There has been good improvement from the previous report, which revealed low numbers opting for the subject and an imbalance between designing and making.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus subjects were art and design, and music, but one Year 13 A-level theatre studies lesson was sampled. Standards were well above average. During the course of the lesson all students achieved well using their previous understanding of dramatic theory to experiment with a range of comedic theatrical devices to explore a scene from *The Government Inspector*. The quality of teaching and learning was very good. The teacher employed a range of techniques that included questioning a character in role and encouraging individual students to direct, and all students to consider their use of space and movement

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results in recent years have been well above average; standards in Year 13 are high.
- Students develop good levels of individuality in their work.
- Good relationships with teachers encourage and support students in exploring media and ideas.

But...

- The lack of some resources, such as storage and technical support, have an adverse effect on the students' experience.

Commentary

192. The A-level results in 2002 were high compared with all schools. The AS results in 2003 were polarised, with both very high attainment and relatively low attainment amongst the group. The higher attaining students amongst these have mainly continued to A-level. About half of the current Year 13 group have joined the school for the sixth form.

193. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average. Students are refining and developing their work well from mostly A grades at AS, to reflect their own interests and individuality. The others, whose standards were not so high, show good achievement since Year 12 and achievement in Year 13 is much better. Recent investment in ICT for the department has led to imaginative use of manipulated imagery in the students' portfolios, and standards in this aspect of their work are very good. Students learn effectively and well about artists' styles, incorporating these into their own visual work very effectively. Their writing about such studies shows well above average understanding. Communication skills are properly promoted in students' sketchbook research work and the spatial aspects, supporting mathematics, are sound. Students in Year 13 are achieving well, particularly in the distinctive characteristics of each student's interpretations. Year 12 work includes the usual wide range of standards; some students have strong GCSE grades, but others have not experienced art since Year 9. These students are already beginning to achieve well.
194. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students value the good relationships they enjoy with staff. They feel enabled to develop their own personal styles and strengths in a supportive environment, which encourages them to explore ideas. The one-to-one interactions between students and staff are more effective in developing good learning than when teachers use a lecturing style. The strength of teaching lies in the development of sufficient freedom and challenge for students to take risks in exploring ideas independently. Students now have some double periods, and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. However, they are still rightly critical of the many single lessons timetabled, which significantly hinder their achievement.
195. Curriculum leadership of art and design in the sixth form is good. Assessment is better than in the main school, because it focuses very strongly on individuals' development. Self-assessment of completed units is useful, but students are still unclear about what levels they are working at, or what grades they are likely to attain. The one-to-one oral assessments characteristic of lessons are seldom formalised in a way which targets students' next steps for improvement to which they can later refer. Students' development of large-scale work is restricted by a lack of storage in the department and they have no dedicated studio space either. The lack of technician support exacerbates the effects of single 50minute lessons, because teachers cannot always organise resources in advance, to maximise the use of time.

Music

Provision in music is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning lead to good achievement;
- Good relationships in the department lead to sixth formers helping, and often taking responsibility for, extra curricular activities;
- Very good assessment strategies help pupils set future targets;
- Technology is used very well to enhance learning;

But...

- The department would benefit from having technical support;
- The reduced amount of teaching time for both music and music technology has a negative effect on standards.

Commentary

196. The 2002 A-level results were well above average, and students performed better than expected from previous GCSE results. In music technology, A -level students performed at or above the expected levels; numbers taking this course were too small to allow reliable comparison with national averages. The situation in 2003 is broadly similar.

197. Standards of work seen are above average. Achievement is good in both courses with pupils showing good achievement according to their capabilities. In a Year 12 lesson, effective use was made of power point to develop students' understanding of the process of the composition of film music, drawing upon a DVD presentation of an interview with John Williams. Worksheets were used to help focus the students' attention on the most important parts of the interview. Careful class discussion reinforced these points, linking John Williams's observations with the students' own film compositions. . Oral skills in lessons are well developed with students able to discuss music fluently and give extended answers. Students also show well above average abilities in ICT and are good at researching additional material for written assignments.
198. Teaching and learning are good overall. Features of good teaching include the careful planning of activities, good pace, an appropriate level of challenge and well-chosen resources. Technology, including ICT, is used very well to enhance the learning experiences of students in the classroom. In performing activities, pupils have been carefully prepared for the examination requirements and have a performing report, which includes self-evaluation and specific criteria for improvement. Marking and assessment of student work is evaluative as well as diagnostic, and this contributes well to achievement; students know how well they are doing and what must be done to improve further. Homework and private study work are designed to enhance classroom learning.
199. Leadership is very good, and although the head of department has only recently been appointed, she has already made a significant impact in the department. A strength is the use made of ICT. The number of pupils who did not achieve their full potential and who failed to continue with music technology from AS was significant last year.
200. There has been improvement since the last inspection and the department has invested heavily in ICT including a recording and mixing studio with numerous computer and multi-track equipment. These resources are still being developed to enable staff to deliver the course requirements. Sixth formers have an important and proactive role in the department helping staff and running musical activities. Technical support in the department is lacking. There is a wide range of computers and recording equipment, used by both music and music technology students, and the lack of technical support does have an adverse impact on their achievement

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Core physical education was sampled during the inspection. This subject was introduced into the sixth form in 2003. One lesson of aerobics, led by a qualified instructor, was observed. Standards were well above average; the small group of female students and their supervisory physical education teacher copy and perform energetic routines. Achievement is very good. Relationships and commitment are excellent.

BUSINESS

The focus course was the A-level in business studies. Economics was also sampled. Results in economics have been well above average since the previous inspection. Results in 2002 were high, and in the highest five per cent of schools nationally; those of 2003 are similar. Students, who are mostly male, tend to do better than would be expected from their already strong previous GCSE grades. Teaching in the Year 13 lesson seen was very good; students were challenged intellectually, and responded vigorously. A strength was their ability to draw evidence from a range of sources, weigh its value, and isolate the key features, all in a short period.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- The teaching is characterised by intellectual rigour and challenge that promotes good achievement.
- Students are particularly successful in drawing together the various parts of the course, and in weighing a range of evidence, when reaching judgements.
- The students know how their work is assessed, and use this to improve the quality of what they do.

But...

- The subject needs to make better use of teaching resources.

Commentary

201. Following the previous inspection, the trend in examination results was downwards because of falling standards amongst male students. By 2002, males gained average results, whilst those of female students were well above average. Lower attaining students tended to show underachievement. In 2003, after focused work by the department, male and female students once again performed at similar levels; most reached results that were at or above those expected from their GCSE grades.
202. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average for the end of the course. Students show good achievement overall, in particular in developing, over time, the skills of analysis and evaluation that are required for the highest grades. Students of all attainment levels gain a good understanding of the basic concepts in the subject, and quickly become able to apply what has been learned to new contexts. Almost all students acquire a secure ability to weigh evidence drawn from different sources, and to move beyond the obvious answers. This was seen, for example, in a case study involving investment appraisal. Students refused to accept a simply numerate analysis as the basis for their comments; they sought to look at ethical factors as well. Male and female students show well above average skills in planning and writing their answers. Oral communication skills are average; technical vocabulary is used accurately, but contributions sometimes lack fluency. Standards in application of number are well above average; the subject is effective in promoting the students' numeracy skills in a wide range of situations. Students also show well above average abilities in ICT; they are efficient in researching evidence.
203. Teaching and learning are good overall. Some is very good, and all is at least satisfactory. All teachers have very good subject knowledge, which extends far beyond the confines of the course. Students therefore gain a wide knowledge of business matters. Since they are also given a clear understanding of how the course is designed and assessed, they integrate ideas from different topics with ease. Exchanges in the classroom between teachers and students are characterised by respect and intellectual sharpness; woolly thinking is challenged at once, and students are expected to refine their own hypotheses. Most marking is effective in giving students a clear picture of how well they are doing, and how they might improve. However, some portfolios show long gaps in the marking record.
204. The curriculum leadership of the subject is good. Data on the decline in standards and the underperformance of lower attaining students in 2002 were used to good effect to make additional provisions, including extra revision classes and holiday sessions, in order to improve their performance. The management of the subject is also good, with regular monitoring of the work of the members of the team. The subject makes good use of the wider business community in developing learning. Whilst textbook and ICT resources are good, the lack of use of teaching aids such as projectors means that teaching is not as efficient, and thus learning as effective, as they could be. The subject received little mention in the previous inspection report, and so it is not possible to judge improvement since then.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

There are no courses in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Work in general studies was sampled. Examination results in 2002 were well above average overall, with female students doing rather better than would be expected from their GCSE results; male students gained expected results. In the lesson seen, teaching was satisfactory, as was achievement. The work was marked by warm and humorous relationships and good explanation by the teacher. However, discussion was dominated by the teacher; students had inadequate opportunities to play a full part in the work.

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	3	3
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	3	2
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	4	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' 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	4	4
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	3	3

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