

INSPECTION REPORT

HARDENHUISH SCHOOL

Chippenham

LEA area: Wiltshire

Unique reference number: 126509

Headteacher: Mr C E Smith

Lead inspector: Bill Stoneham

Dates of inspection: 6th – 10th October 2003

Inspection number: 259151

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

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Terms used in this report

Key Stage 3 refers to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. **Key Stage 4** refers to pupils who are in Years 10 and 11. 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 in 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. 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 awards in the General Certificate of Education (**GCE**) at Advanced level (**A-level**) or Advanced Subsidiary level (**AS-level**), or the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**).

Inspectors judge the **standards** pupils reach 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 have done as well as expected. Such 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.

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of shorthand notations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, the notation **ICT** refers to information and communication technology. The term **SENCO** refers to the special educational needs co-ordinator. An **IEP** is an individual education plan. **PHSE** refers to the school's programme for personal, health and social education. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003 for Years 7 to 11, but on the academic year 2001/2002 for Years 12 and 13. No reference is made to pupils for whom English is an additional language. At the time of the inspection judgements about the achievement of pupils with English as an additional language did not apply to the school. There have been pupils who received language support in the past, however, and systems are in place should the need arise in the future.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1436
School address:	Hardenhuish School Hardenhuish Lane Chippenham Wiltshire
Postcode:	SN14 6RJ
Telephone number:	01249 650693
Fax number:	01249 445952
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr S Vince
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Hardenhuish is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school located in the market town of Chippenham. It has 1436 pupils aged between 11 and 18, of whom 249 are in the sixth form, which is of average size. The school has recently been awarded specialist status as a computing and mathematics college and holds other awards including Investors in People, Sportsmark and the Schools Curriculum Award. The area served by the school is mixed, but on balance the socio-economic background of the pupils is favourable. Standards on entry to Year 7 are average overall and are above average on entry to the sixth form. Approximately 60 per cent of pupils in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is broadly average; however, the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is above average. This is mainly because the school houses a designated special learning unit for dyslexia, which caters for up to 30 pupils. The ethnic mix of the school reflects that of the surrounding area, being almost exclusively white race; very few pupils speak English as an additional language and none is in the early stages of language development. There are very few pupils from travelling, refugee or asylum seeking families. Fewer than three per cent of pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times of the year.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
27407	Bill Stoneham	Lead inspector	
12775	Judith Goodchild	Lay inspector	
11508	Christopher Griffin	Team inspector	English English literature Post 16
31441	Maggie King	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics Post 16
30825	Keith Hayton	Team inspector	Science Physics Post 16
32183	Karen Roche	Team inspector	Design and Technology Design and Technology Post 16
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Information and Communications Technology Information and Communications Technology Post 16
31690	Bridgit Smith	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
30427	Felicity Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History History Post 16
15462	Clifford Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography Geography Post 16
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art and Design Art and Design Post 16
15304	Reg Fletcher	Team inspector	Music
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical Education
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Religious Education
2740	Elizabeth Barratt	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs Psychology Post 16
14638	Steven Williams	Team inspector	Business Studies Business Studies Post 16 Leisure and Recreation Post 16
7428	Ray Jardine	Team inspector	Biology Post 16 Chemistry Post 16

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is good with outstanding features. Standards in the main school are above average, representing good achievement. Standards in the sixth form are also above average and students achieve well. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was good. The school collects much assessment data, but the good practice seen in some departments is not consistent across the whole school. The work of the school has been enhanced by recent improvements to accommodation and learning resources. Good value for money is offered in the main school and in the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and inspirational, and is supported by very good leadership and management from key staff and the governing body.
- In Years 7 to 11, attainment in mathematics is well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Sixth form provision in the three sciences of biology, chemistry and physics is very good.
- Pupils benefit from the very good programme for personal development, including citizenship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which secures very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good, including the centre for specific learning difficulties.
- The partnership with parents and the community is excellent, as is the provision made for vocational education and work related learning in Years 10 and 11.
- The quality of teaching is having a positive impact on learning and achievement.
- There needs to be a more coherent and consistent approach for the provision of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum.
- In some subjects, assessment needs to play an integral part in raising standards and supporting learning.
- In the sixth form, the quality of the enrichment programme, especially in relation to physical education, requires improvement.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The key issues identified in the previous report have been addressed very well, academic standards have continued to rise and the quality of teaching and learning, which was identified as a strength, has improved further.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	B	B	B	B

*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.*

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	n/a	A	B	

Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average

Overall, achievement in the school is good. In all years, standards are above average and achievement is good. Standards in English and science are above average and in mathematics they are well above average. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well overall, but very well in Years 10 and 11, mainly because of the additional provisions made by the school. In Years 7 to 9 achievement is good in most subjects, but in mathematics, design and technology and music it is very good and it is satisfactory in ICT. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is very good in mathematics, religious education, geography, history, design and technology, business studies and music. It is good in all other subjects except modern foreign languages, where it is

satisfactory. In the sixth form achievement is good in all the focus subjects, except biology, chemistry and leisure and recreation where it is very good.

The pupils' personal qualities are very good. Attitudes and behaviour are very good, attendance is good and punctuality is satisfactory. **Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.** The strengths noted at the previous inspection have been at least maintained.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. In the main school, it is very good in mathematics, citizenship, design and technology, geography, history, music and religious education. In all other subjects teaching and learning are good. In the sixth form, teaching and learning are very good in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, design and technology and geography. They are good in art and design, history, business studies, psychology and leisure and recreation and satisfactory in ICT. Throughout the school, learning is enhanced by the subject specialist staff and by the very good relationships that exist between staff and pupils. Recent improvements in accommodation particularly help learning in subjects such as design and technology and music.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are very good. The governance of the school is very good, as is its management. Leadership is very good overall, with the headteacher offering excellent and inspirational leadership.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have a very high opinion of the school and are very supportive of its work. They particularly like the school's induction arrangements, the way that it encourages pupils to become mature and responsible, the expectations that staff have of pupils, the quality of teaching and the approachability of the school. The only area of doubt concerned how well parents are informed about the progress their children make at school, however, the inspection team found there were good reporting systems in place.

Pupils in the main school were generally positive about the school in almost all areas where questioned. They too saw the school as a place which expected them to do well and they find the staff approachable and keen to help them to learn and to develop as individuals. There were some adverse comments about bullying and that the staff did not always treat the pupils fairly, but discussion and observation revealed a high quality pastoral system and pupils who were interviewed were confident that they could ask members of staff for help.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Throughout the school, ensure a more coherent and consistent approach to the provision of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum to promote better learning.
- Throughout the school, ensure that staff in all departments work in a consistent way to maximise the impact of assessment on raising attainment.
- In the sixth form, improve the quality of the enrichment programme, especially in relation to physical education.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

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

THE SIXTH FORM AT HARDENHUISH SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Standards are above average and students are achieving at better levels than predicted, based on their GCSE results. Course retention rates are very good and are over 90 per cent in all subjects. Teaching and learning are good and leadership and management are good. For standards to rise further there is a need for more consistency across departments in their use of assessment data. Some sixth form teaching is done jointly with a neighbouring school, but this is a small part of the school's provision. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The quality of teaching is good and leads to good learning.
- Learning is further aided by the very good attitudes and behaviour of the students.
- The taught curriculum is very good and reflects the needs of the students.
- Provision in the three sciences of biology, chemistry and physics is very good.
- There needs to be a more coherent and consistent approach for the provision of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum.
- In some subjects, assessment needs to play an integral part in raising standards and supporting learning.
- The quality of the enrichment programme, especially in relation to physical education, requires improvement.

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	Provision is very good . Very good teaching and learning enthuses the students who achieve very well.
Mathematics	Provision is very good . The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students achieve well.
Science	Provision in biology, chemistry and physics is very good . In all three subjects teaching and learning are very good and students achieve at least well. Leadership and management are also very good.
Information and communication technology	Provision is satisfactory with good aspects in practical lessons..
Humanities	Provision is good in geography, history and psychology . Fieldwork contributes well to standards in geography and history and students work well on individual research assignments. In psychology students are motivated by lively teaching.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision is design and technology is very good . Students show good levels of independence in their project work.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art and design is satisfactory . Students benefit from individual tuition, but ICT resources could be improved.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in leisure and recreation is good . Standards are above average, with students achieving well.
Business	Provision is very good . Standards are high. The quality of teaching and learning is good and students achieve well. Leadership and management are good.

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

Students are supported well by their pastoral staff and there is a good induction programme for students entering the sixth form. Students are suitably advised about their higher education and employment opportunities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are both good. The taught curriculum is well planned and meets students' needs. The evaluation of the work of the sixth form undertaken annually by the head of sixth form is very good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and regard the teaching they receive as being demanding and helpful. Some are critical of the advice they receive about courses in the sixth form but, overall, they believe that the sixth form is run well and is a harmonious community.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The achievement of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good. Pupils enter the school with average standards, but by the end of Year 9 standards are above average. Standards are also above average at the end of Year 11 but the school's own analysis of value added shows that, overall, pupils gain better results at GCSE than is predicted by their prior attainment. Standards in the sixth form are above average. Students start their sixth form courses with above average prior attainment and, overall, gain better results by the end of Year 13 than predicted. Their achievements are, therefore, good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils achieve well overall and very well in mathematics, business studies, design and technology, geography, history, music, religious education and citizenship.
- Pupils with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well because of the specialist support they are offered.
- Overall achievement in the sixth form is good; it is very good in biology, chemistry, physics and leisure and recreation.
- Achievement would be higher if departments used assessment data with more consistency to set pupils and students targets and review their progress against such targets.
- In order for standards to rise further, there needs to be a more coherent and consistent approach for the provision of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum.

Commentary

1. In national test results in 2003, standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 were broadly average in English and above average in mathematics and science when compared to all schools nationally. The overall results in these three core subjects were above average. In comparison to similar schools based on free school meals, standards were below average overall. They were below average in English and science, but were average in mathematics. Compared to schools with similar levels of prior attainment, standards are average overall and are average in English, mathematics and science. This suggests that assessment data is not used with sufficient rigour to set pupils challenging targets and monitor their performance against such targets. Present pupils entered the school with average levels of prior attainment, but their standards are above average. This improvement owes much to the quality of teaching that is provided. Achievement is good.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	72 (64)	70 (66)
Mathematics	76 (71)	73 (67)
Science	74 (72)	71 (66)

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

2. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were well above average when compared to all schools nationally. When compared to similar schools based on free school meals, results were average, but were above average when based on prior attainment. Overall, pupils continue to work well and improve their standards, with school data showing that attainment at GCSE is better than predicted by prior attainment. This is indicative of good achievement. Present pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also working at levels that are above average and they too are achieving well. During the inspection, the quality of teaching and learning seen was consistently of a good quality, promoting good achievement.

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	64 (56)	50 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (93)	90 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (98)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.2 (39.9)	34.3 (39.8)

There were 243 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In the 2003 GCSE results standards were above average in many subjects and were well above average in business studies, design and technology, drama, geography, history, music, religious education and Spanish. In ICT standards were average and they were well below average in German. An analysis of these results shows that achievement was good overall, but in a healthy number of subjects, such as mathematics, business studies, design and technology, drama, geography, history, music, religious education and Spanish, achievement was very good. The main factors contributing to these successes are the quality of teaching and the commitment and willingness to learn of the pupils.
4. Inspection evidence based on lesson observations and analysis of pupils' work indicates that for present pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, standards are above average in most subjects and are well above average in mathematics; pupils are achieving well. Standards are average in German, Spanish, physical education, music and art and below average in ICT. In Years 10 and 11 standards are above average in most subjects but well above in mathematics, business studies, drama, geography, history, music and religious education. In German and Spanish standards are average. As the inspection was conducted very early in the academic year, the difference between present standards and standards reached in recent examination results probably reflects the fact that in many cases pupils had either only just started their examination courses, or were, at best, little more than half way through the syllabus.
5. Inspection evidence based on lesson observations and analysis of pupils' work indicates that present pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well in most subjects and very well in mathematics, business studies, design and technology, drama, geography, history, music, religious education and citizenship. In ICT achievement is satisfactory. Where pupils are achieving very well it is often as a result of the consistently high quality teaching they experience.
6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, and especially in Years 10 and 11 where they achieve very well at GCSE, largely because of the specialist support they are offered. At all stages they make good progress in improving their reading and spelling ages and grow in self-esteem and confidence. Their achievement at GCSE is very good in comparison with their learning difficulties. In 2003, 20 pupils with special educational needs gained GCSE grades A* to G in up to eight subjects and those who entered the school with very poor literacy skills all achieved grades in English language. Pupils make consistently good progress in achieving their objectives in their Statements of Special Educational Needs and achieve well in nearly all subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and history. Their achievement in art and physical education is slowed at times because there is not enough specialist support.

Sixth Form

7. Standards reached in A Level and equivalent level examinations in 2002 were above average. Standards were above average for both boys and girls. Many subjects returned 100 per cent pass rates and standards were well above average in biology, business studies, design and technology, mathematics, religious education and drama and in the AVCE courses in ICT, leisure and recreation and travel and tourism. In A Level physics, standards were very high and were in the top five per cent nationally. Standards were above average in all other subjects except English literature and geography, where they were average. The standard on entry for this year group of students was above average. They successfully built on this base and the school's own extensive value added analysis clearly indicates that overall attainment was better than predicted based on GCSE results. The achievement of this group of students during their sixth form studies overall was, therefore, good. The unvalidated examination data for 2003 illustrates similar trends to those in 2002.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.2 (98.5)	96.2 (89.1)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	45.6 (50.0)	39.4 (37.9)
Average point score per pupil	262.8 (n/a)	263.3 (n/a)

There were 96 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

For present students in the 13 subjects on which the inspection focused, standards are above average overall, but well above average in English literature, mathematics, chemistry, biology and business studies; in art and design standards are average. Attainment on entry is above average, teaching and learning are good and students achieve well overall, but achievement is better in Year 13 than in Year 12. This outcome can be accounted for because Year 12 students are new to their courses and are naturally taking a little time to adjust. In some subjects, however, such as biology, chemistry and leisure and recreation, achievement is very good overall. No differences in achievement between female and male students were discernible.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes towards school and their work are very good. Attendance is good, and punctuality is satisfactory. Behaviour is very good. The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attitudes that pupils and students display towards their learning are very good and contribute significantly to the standards they achieve.
- The spiritual, moral and social development of pupils and students is very good.
- The behaviour of pupils both in lessons and around the school is very good.
- Relationships between pupils, students and staff are very good.
- A significant minority of pupils are late arriving at school for the first lesson of the day.
- More could be done to enable pupils to appreciate the rich variety of cultures and traditions that exist in multi-cultural Britain.

Commentary

8. The attitudes of pupils towards their learning are very good. They respond well to the high quality of teaching evident in many subjects where the pace of learning is high and pupils are intellectually challenged. A small number of pupils, on occasions, fail to engage in lessons but there are appropriate systems in place to prevent this disrupting the learning of others. Behaviour in the majority of lessons is very good. Pupils are courteous to each other and visitors. Relationships between pupils and staff are based on mutual respect and are a significant feature of the school.

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	1253	78	0
White – Irish	3	0	0
White – any other White background	19	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	9	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	8	2	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	2	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	56	3	0

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

9. Pupils with special educational needs have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They work hard in lessons, concentrate well and are keen to succeed. They respond very well to challenge and relish their success. Behaviour and classroom relationships are very good.

10. The spiritual, moral and social development of pupils is very good. The religious education syllabus and the teaching provide very good opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils and opportunities exist in other subjects to enhance this feature of personal development. Pupils have a respect for the beliefs of others and have a clear understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and form judgements that enable them to develop philosophical insights. Pupils are well aware of right and wrong actions and have a very clear understanding of what is expected of them. They were involved in the drawing up of the new behaviour policy, which is based on the philosophy of ‘treating others as you expect them to treat you’. Their knowledge and understanding is reflected well in their actions expressing concern for others in both the school and wider community. The school council provides a forum that aims to encourage pupils and students to play a more active role in future developments that affect the school community. Pupils’ cultural awareness is good. They are aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. They have a clear understanding of the tradition of the school and demonstrate in their lessons a sound knowledge of other cultures. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness and appreciation of the rich variety of different cultures and traditions that exist in this country that will prepare them to live in a multicultural society. There is no daily collective act of worship.

11. The attendance of pupils is good and above the national standard for all schools. There are a significant minority of pupils who arrive after the start of the first period in the morning. In some cases this is due to transport difficulties.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.2

National data	7.8
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National data	1.2
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The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Sixth Form

As in the main school students demonstrate very good attitudes towards their studies and work hard to achieve the grades in external examinations they need to further their career aspirations. They provide good role models for younger pupils by acting as mentors to the incoming Year 7 pupils.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Overall, the school provides a good quality of education for its pupils and students. Teaching is good, though a more consistent use could be made of data on academic performance at departmental level to ensure that all pupils and students are properly challenged and stretched. The curriculum is very good, though opportunities for enrichment in the sixth form need improving. Accommodation and resources are now very good following recent major improvements to parts of the school site. Pupils and students receive very good care, guidance and support. Work with parents and partner schools is excellent and it is very good with the wider community.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality is good in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form. Assessment procedures are good overall, but a more consistent use of assessment data to improve further levels of attainment is needed.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching is good and helps pupils and students to learn well.
- A high proportion of lessons seen were very good and better and this is contributing to the above average standards of the school.
- Pupils and students benefit from regular teaching from confident subject specialists.
- Assessment data is comprehensive but its use as a device to raise standards further is not always consistent or informative.

Commentary

12. Much of the teaching and learning that was seen was at least good and was often very good or excellent. Fourteen excellent lessons were seen, spread across all years. The very good teaching was spread across year groups and across subjects. Only a minority of lessons failed to offer teaching and learning of a suitable quality.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 198 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
14 (7%)	76 (38%)	65 (33%)	40 (20%)	3 (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.

13. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was consistent both across subjects and year groups, and has improved since the last inspection, when it was described as 'a strength'. The findings of the inspection team mirror the views of parents, pupils and students, all of whom had commented favourably on teaching. The quality seen reflects the work that the school puts into monitoring and evaluating its own performance, plus the care that is taken in recruiting staff.
14. Many strengths of teaching can be identified, not least that in most lessons seen teaching was delivered by subject specialists and this made a significant contribution to the learning of all pupils. Learning also benefited because lessons were well planned, they were challenging, the

pace was pitched correctly and the pupils were given appropriate opportunities to enhance their learning by working independently or collaboratively. In the good and better lessons a range of strategies were used to engage and extend the pupils' learning. This enabled the pupils to achieve well. Many staff showed good levels of initiative and enterprise. Computers are widely used across the curriculum and pupils are regularly encouraged to use their ICT communication and research capabilities in a good variety of lessons but they have too few opportunities to practise and hone other computer skills. Pupils use word processing and desktop publishing skilfully to present their work in a good number of subjects.

15. In Years 7 to 11, teaching and learning were at least good in all subjects inspected. In a number of subjects, including mathematics, citizenship, design and technology, geography, history, music and religious education, teaching and learning were very good. During the inspection a healthy number of excellent lessons were seen. Where teaching and learning were especially good, lessons were paced well, the pupils were challenged and very good opportunities were presented to pupils to work independently. Staff set the tone for the lesson based on careful planning, but the expectation was that the pupils came to lessons to work. This aim was achieved with regularity and in many classes pupils are emerging as confident and independent learners. Where teaching and learning were less effective, teachers opted for tasks that were less demanding and their expectations of what the pupils might achieve were lower. Teaching became too teacher centred and pace slowed. Such lessons, however, were in the minority and clustered in Year 7 and to a lesser extent in Year 10. This probably represents some uncertainty by staff of the levels pupils had reached at the end of their previous learning stage.
16. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs are very good. Specialist teaching in the learning support department is highly skilled and well tuned to meet individual needs and helps boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Creative strategies are used effectively to provide pace, challenge and enjoyment. Teachers plan learning in manageable steps and skilled, probing questioning checks and deepens understanding. Pupils work at full stretch with great enjoyment and pride. Teaching and learning are consistently good in nearly all subjects and very good in English, mathematics and history. Subject teachers understand pupils' learning requirements well and most ensure that work is explained very clearly and matched well to pupils' needs. Practice in design and technology is particularly good with pupils being given guides to help them through the different processes. Teaching in small lower ability sets is effective in providing good individual tuition. Pupils also benefit from good support from teaching assistants. Learning is often noticeably slower where teaching assistant support is not available. This was particularly evident in two parallel Year 8 art lessons. Pupils responded very well in the lesson where there was good support, but did significantly less well in the one where no support was offered. The lack of teaching assistant support in physical education lessons slows progress and can result in disruptive behaviour. Pupils' progress is closely monitored through regular testing, which includes an appropriate range of tests to identify reading and spelling ages. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) set targets for improvement but these are not sufficiently measurable and the timing of the review of targets is not well matched to the differing amount of time needed for their achievement. The annual reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs are well informed by the assessment of pupils' progress in subjects. Assessment is particularly effective in mathematics in identifying pupils' learning needs and in tracking their progress.
17. The school is proud of the work it has done to improve the accuracy of its assessment and to identify not just standards, but also achievement. Pupils have clear targets and their progress against these targets is monitored by the school. The school has designed a clear system for measuring pupils' and students' achievements. It is used well to identify areas of success or underachievement of both individuals and groups. These systems are detailed and thorough. However, this information is not always communicated to departments in a form that they readily understand and can use. There is a need for all departments to work in a consistent way to maximise the impact of assessment on raising attainment by ensuring that all departments set pupils and students targets and that they are provided with sufficient written information so they know what their targets are, how well they are doing in relation to their targets and what they need

to do to improve further. Moreover, inspection evidence indicated that target grades are not consistently reviewed and that changes reflecting good or better progress by pupils are infrequently made.

18. The school's marking policy ensures that marking is consistent and comments identify ways they may improve their work. English, mathematics and science involve pupils well in the use of National Curriculum levels though most other departments use other marking schemes. In a minority of departments, use of assessment levels is at an early stage.

Sixth Form

19. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the subjects on which the inspection focussed, teaching and learning were satisfactory in ICT and were good in history, business studies, art and design, psychology and leisure and recreation. The teaching of English literature, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, design and technology and geography was very good. In these subjects learning was also very good.
20. Sixth formers benefit from the commitment, enthusiasm and subject knowledge of their teachers. In many classes, and especially in Year 13 where staff and students have worked longer together, learning benefits from the strong mutual respect that has developed. Students attend lessons expecting to be challenged and they respond most positively to the teaching strategies employed. It was particularly refreshing to hear a group of sixth formers praising the work and commitment of their tutors. The students appreciated the efforts made on their behalf and the compliments included a reference to 'inspirational teaching in physics'. Such high praise is rarely heard by inspection teams.
21. Sixth formers benefit from one-to-one interviews with their tutors where their academic progress is reviewed, but they are not generally involved in self-assessment. Most know their predicted grades, but are less clear about how they are performing in relation to their target and what they need to do to improve. The school does provide one-to-one interviews for students when detailed advice is given, but as the inspection was five weeks into the school year not many of these sessions had taken place. As in the main school, mechanisms for reviewing targets and upgrading where necessary, such as in the light of a good performance, are not embedded.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. It is very good in the sixth form. The opportunities for activities beyond lessons are very good but the school does not offer a daily act of collective worship. The school has very good accommodation, particularly with recently opened buildings such as those for design technology and music. Resources for learning are good although the provision for computers is variable across subjects. The school offers a much better curriculum than at the time of the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's philosophy of matching courses to pupils' needs is a real strength.
- The chances provided for pupils to broaden their vocational experience and work-related learning are excellent.
- The school provides a wide range of enrichment opportunities outside the school day.
- The very good careers programme contributes well to guiding pupils' next stage of learning.
- Students in the sixth form do not benefit from any planned enrichment programme in sports and games.
- The below average time allocated for design and technology, art and design and modern foreign languages reduces the achievement of some pupils.

Commentary

22. The school provides courses for pupils in Years 7 to 9 to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and these are supplemented by personal and social education and careers education. The curriculum provides very well for all pupils, including offering good support for pupils with special educational needs, the disaffected and pupils who are gifted and talented. Innovative arrangements are established through the setting up of the 'Annexe' to support pupils who have learning or personal difficulties and help them integrate into the curricular life of the school. This has met with much success, such as improved attendance of pupils who previously were absentees. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is well conceived and offers four 'routes' that meet the different needs and interests of pupils. The vocational aspects of these arrangements are excellent. In addition to the compulsory core subjects of English, mathematics, science, physical education and personal education, pupils are now prepared for the GCSE dual award in vocational ICT. Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to participate in activities beyond lessons. In sports, for example, there are form and inter-school competitions in most major sports and some extend into foreign tours. Similarly very good provision occurs in music and participation rates are high. The school benefits from careers education 'Connexions' on site and support and guidance provided gives pupils a good insight into potential careers pathways. ICT is increasingly being used throughout the curriculum but access to the school's main provision is a difficulty and this is hindering development in some subjects.

Example of outstanding practice

The school's commitment to inclusion is amply demonstrated in its excellent work related learning programme in Years 10 and 11. There are various strands to this programme, including some pupils attending a local residential special school where construction and motor vehicle maintenance can be studied. This programme provides youngsters, most of whom have not enjoyed much educational success in the past, with opportunities to shine at tasks they enjoy and which they would like to pursue when they leave school. The enthusiasm with which youngsters were seen tackling car maintenance tasks was infectious. The practical session had been very well planned and had already covered aspects of health and safety and relevant theory. The pupils' practical skills were underpinned by the development of their skills in literacy, numeracy and the use and application of ICT. The response of all was excellent and the pupils spoke knowledgeably and with pride about their work. Their progress is significant and owes much to the skills of their instructors and the excellent management of this aspect of the curriculum by the school.

23. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. It is very well planned to provide a broad, balanced and fully inclusive range of opportunities appropriately adapted to meet pupils' specific learning requirements. In addition to pupils' full access to the whole curriculum, a wide range of activities and strategies are provided to enable them to benefit fully from this. These include well-targeted support by teaching assistants in lessons and flexible arrangements for the withdrawal of pupils for specialist support as needed. Every care is taken to minimise any disruption to learning in subjects. The adaptation of English National Curriculum and GCSE courses to meet pupils' needs is a particular strength, as are the special arrangements for GCSE examinations, which enable pupils to achieve well. The alternative mathematics courses in Years 7 and 8 are highly effective in adapting the National Numeracy Strategy to support pupils' learning. In Years 10 and 11 flexible arrangements offer appropriate learning opportunities in, for example, work related courses. Enrichment is provided through lunchtime activities and the strong encouragement for pupils to take part in the school's extra-curricular programme. Accommodation is attractive and provides a positive and welcoming learning environment, which is valued by pupils. Resources are very carefully chosen and well used to support learning, but there is insufficient access to the use of computers. All pupils with special educational needs receive their entitlement to the curriculum. Provision is based on a clear rationale that shows benefit to the pupils involved.

24. There are, however, some issues with the curriculum. In art and design for example, the combination of single periods and low time allocation results in insufficient depth of study of the three-dimensional aspects of work.

Sixth form

25. The school offers a wide range of AS and A level courses that are suitable for students staying in the sixth form, providing a good basis for continuing their education. Emphasis has been placed more on providing academic courses since neighbouring colleges provide a range of vocational courses. Thus students who wish to follow this route have the option of transferring to the college at the age of 16, including those with special educational needs. The school arrangements for religious education are embodied within the general studies course and the units of study are common for all students. There are some opportunities for students to participate in activities beyond lessons, but very little formal provision exists for sport. The programme for enrichment activities needs to be reviewed.

Care, guidance and support

The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is very good. The steps taken to ensure the pupils' health and welfare are very good. The involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The investment the school has made in the high quality pastoral system provides very good support and guidance for pupils and students in the sixth form.
- The excellent personal and social education programme prepares pupils and students well for life beyond school and the pressures that young people are subjected to.
- Academic monitoring sessions review progress to date and help pupils and students set targets to raise their level of attainment.
- The school is very committed to providing an alternative curriculum for disaffected pupils.
- Pupils know that their views matter and are taken seriously by the school.

Commentary

26. The school has invested in developing a high quality pastoral system that provides very good support for both pupils and students. Pastoral managers have an appropriate time allocation to enable them to fulfil effectively their roles and oversee the progress and development of their year group. Pastoral teams stay with their year group throughout years 7 to 11. They are able to build strong relationships with the pupils and their families that are supportive and promote good learning. This very good knowledge of pupils and their background helps the school to provide support when needed. Pupils interviewed were confident that they would be able to ask members of staff for help, either academic or personal. Targets, both academic and personal, are set during personal interviews between tutor and pupil, and are reviewed on a regular basis.
27. The excellent personal, social and health education programme supports pupils' personal and social development. Issues such as sex and drugs education are effectively addressed and the knowledge and understanding that pupils gain enables them to make informed choices. Effective guidance is provided for pupils in Year 9 when selecting the subjects for GCSE and they are well prepared for both work experience and transition into post-16 education or the world of work. Connexions careers service staff provide individual interviews for all pupils in Year 11. The alternative curriculum arrangements provided for those pupils who are at risk of dropping out of mainstream education are very good and ensure pupils leave school with some qualifications.
28. Pupils with special educational needs are very well cared for, guided and supported. Their learning needs are extremely well known from the time they enter the school, and their progress and academic and personal development are very closely monitored. The Annexe behaviour centre provides positive support for pupils with emotional behavioural difficulties (EBD) and other behaviour problems. The referral process ensures that only those pupils with clearly identified difficulties and requirements are admitted for fixed periods. Individual programmes, providing for the withdrawal of pupils from lessons and situations where they experience most difficulty, are designed carefully to meet specific needs. There is a strong focus on

boosting pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' progress is closely monitored and teachers are kept informed. Re-integration into lessons is monitored carefully. This intervention has proved successful in helping many pupils to overcome disaffection and to engage more purposefully with their learning.

29. Pupils know that their views matter and are taken seriously by both senior staff and the governing body. They were recently involved in developing the new discipline policy. The school council is in its second year and is becoming more proactive in representing the views of pupils but it is too early as yet to see the fruits of its labours.

Sixth form

30. Students in the sixth form are equally well supported by pastoral staff. They benefit from an effective induction programme that prepares them well for the independent style of working and time management skills they need to be successful in their studies. Some students highlighted in their questionnaire returns a lack of advice about future career options, but the inspection team concluded that sixth form students are helped to make informed choices about higher education and are well supported in their applications to university and selection of courses.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with its parents is excellent. The quality of the school's links with the community is very good. The school's links with other schools and colleges are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's partnership with its parents is excellent and promotes the high standards that pupils achieve.
- The quality of links with the community is very good and extends and enriches pupils' educational experience.
- Partnerships with other schools and colleges are excellent. They ensure the smooth transition of pupils into the school and extend the range of learning opportunities available to pupils aged between 14 -19 years.
- No significant areas for development were identified.

Commentary

31. The school's partnership with its parents is excellent. Pastoral Managers have sufficient time allocated to enable them to develop effective relationships with parents. Parent forum meetings for each year group are held each half term where a range of issues are discussed and an agenda for topics that parents would like more information about is set. These topics may be subject related or deal with issues such as sex and drug education. The school also uses these evenings to consult parents about issues relating to the school. Parents are encouraged to become partners with the school in managing their child's learning. Additional evenings on topics such as option choice for GCSE subjects and work experience support this and ensure parents are fully informed. Concerns expressed by parents are usually dealt with immediately by the pastoral managers. Termly reports on academic progress are issued together with a more detailed annual report and a consultation evening provides an opportunity for further discussions. Parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school and the education it provides for their children.
32. The quality of the school's partnerships with the community is very good. The success of the bid to become a specialist Mathematics and Computing School will further enhance this aspect of the school's work. Community partners in this new venture are consulted fully about future developments. The school benefits from effective links with local business and industry both as a source of sponsorship and for placements that support the work of the classroom or give pupils experience of the world of work. Productive working relationships have been established with external agencies, such as the school health service and education welfare service. Regular meetings of the liaison group comprising representatives from different sections of the community, such as the local police and youth workers, enable a pooling of information from different sources about pupils causing concern. The outcome is that all agencies work along consistent lines to support these pupils and retain them in mainstream education.
33. A very close partnership is encouraged with the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are kept fully informed about their child's progress through regular exchange of information in pupils' contact books, two consultation meetings each year, which focus on the progress made in achieving

targets on IEPs and parents. Though some parents would like changes in the timing of the consultation meetings, they are fully involved in the annual reviews of statements of special educational need. In addition parents visit the school frequently to discuss any particular concerns. The school review of provision for special educational needs in 2001-2 sought to strengthen this partnership further with the introduction of a home-school link worker and clinics to provide regular opportunities for parents to discuss any issues concerning their child's progress. These recommendations have been fully accepted but are yet to be implemented. A significant number of parents help to deliver the 'Toe-to-Toe' reading improvement programme.

34. There is an excellent partnership with other schools and colleges. The induction arrangements for Year 6 pupils are excellent. Primary schools benefit from regular curriculum enrichment days for both Year 5 and 6 pupils. Mathematics teachers visit some primary schools and take lessons and a pilot initiative is being developed to introduce modern foreign languages into primary schools. Links with further education colleges, and other alternative provision providers, enable the needs of all students to be met.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership in raising standards and establishing the school's ethos. Leadership of other key staff is also very good – departments are well led, and their work is well co-ordinated. Management is very good and the school runs very smoothly. Governors are very supportive and fulfil their role very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and his clear vision and high aspirations are shared by a very good senior leadership team.
- The governing body plays an effective strategic role in school development.
- The school undertakes rigorous self-evaluation and uses its findings very effectively.
- Excellent financial planning and management are having a significant impact on accommodation and resources.
- While the school sets clear targets for improvements these do not always provide appropriate challenge.

Commentary

35. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership to the school. He has great vision, a real sense of purpose and an unflinching commitment to raising standards. He is an outstanding communicator and motivates staff, pupils, parents, governors and the wider community alike. He is an excellent role model and is held in the highest esteem by all. He has a very strong sense of teamwork yet encourages individuality and flair and strives to include everyone in the life of the school. He has a thorough insight into teaching and curriculum standards and leads effective action to improve both. While ensuring the school's development is securely founded on clear strategic plans his approach is also flexible, enabling the school to respond quickly to changing circumstances and seize new opportunities.
36. A dedicated team of senior staff gives very good support to the headteacher. All have their own specific responsibilities yet they share a very keen sense of corporate responsibility. The school's ambitions are very well supported through its strategic plans. The school analyses its performance and circumstances very carefully to identify the most productive lines of development. Its very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses is often used in innovative ways. For example the school has greatly improved its accommodation through selling a redundant part of the school site and re-investing the proceeds in modern buildings. Senior staff give strong leadership to departments and ensure consistent provision. Departmental development plans accurately reflect the school's priorities and each department has clear targets for pupils' attainment. These targets are helping raise standards but would be more effective if they were fine tuned to reflect departments' previous successes and the national picture of GCSE results in each subject. The data analysis that the school provides for teachers is comprehensive and focuses on achievement but it is not presented in a form that mirrors statistics published by the Government. This makes comparisons with similar schools difficult.
37. Leadership truly values individuals and provides a caring environment in which all can flourish. Pupils with special educational needs are very well catered for and the school provides a work-based curriculum for pupils who find academic courses too difficult. There have been no permanent exclusions recently

because the school works very hard to keep challenging pupils in school, often providing them with an alternative curriculum and specialist adult support.

38. Provision for special educational needs is very well led and managed by the SENCO working in close partnership with the co-ordinator of provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A very clear direction is provided for meeting pupils' special educational needs. Systems and procedures are highly efficient and effective. Teachers and teaching assistants are very well supported and guided. However, the rationale for the deployment of teaching assistants to ensure the best possible support for pupils' learning needs to be reviewed. Very effective liaison systems operate to ensure the close monitoring and support of pupils' personal and academic development from the time they enter the school. These result in a close partnership with parents, primary schools, heads of year, subject departments and external agencies. Systems for communication are very well devised and highly effective in ensuring consistency of provision across the school. The statutory requirements for the annual review of Statements of Special Educational Needs are fully met. The SENCO's oversight of all aspects of provision, including the centre for specific learning difficulties and the annex behaviour centre, ensures coherence and the best use of resources. Very good progress since the last inspection has resulted in high standards of provision being sustained.
39. The school has a clear view of the provision to be made for gifted and talented pupils and students. This builds on to a well-established tradition for offering enrichment activities, which have included residential courses, a range of visits and involvement in challenges such as the Young Engineers competition. The relatively newly appointed coordinator is providing a clear lead for developing practice throughout the school to enable those identified as being gifted and talented to be well supported and appropriately challenged on a daily basis in lessons. Procedures have been developed for the identification of pupils. These are being currently refined to include special ability scales to identify pupils' strengths and learning needs more closely. Teachers are being well supported in the implementation of these approaches through a programme of training.
40. The school manages the quality of teaching very well. Performance management is well established and provides teachers with clear targets for their work. One target is firmly linked to pupil achievement, reflecting the school's ambition to raise standards. However the target is not personal because the same target applies to all staff. For some teachers the target is too soft while for others it is too difficult to achieve. Lesson observations, as part of the performance management review, are used well to gauge strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning across the school. Classroom observations by senior management verify and extend this monitoring. The school uses its best teachers very well to support and advise other staff. The school responds quickly when teaching falls below an acceptable level by providing effective remedial support and training. The school regularly reviews marking and homework and uses the outcome to raise standards. Focused reviews on such aspects as behaviour provide detailed information on whole school issues that is well used to guide staff training, and strategic planning.
41. The school welcomes trainee teachers and caters for them very well and as a result many choose to work at the school once their training is completed. Support for newly qualified staff is excellent; they receive very well focused support in the classroom and a comprehensive introduction to the wider world of education.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	5,188,611*
Total expenditure	5,105,190
Expenditure per student	3,711**

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	826,228*
Balance carried forward to the next year	83,421

**Includes capital from sale of land*

*** Includes capital building costs. The figure is £2988 if capital build is deducted.*

42. Financial management is excellent. The school budgets systematically for all expenditure and is clear about the costs of its development. Budget decisions relate directly to priorities for improvement and benefits to pupils. The school has managed the income generated from the sale of land very well and ensures that principles of best value are applied to all spending decisions. The school has implemented all but one of the recommendations in the last auditor's report. The final recommendation will shortly be coming before governors. The school's income is broadly average and in the light of its good outcomes it gives good value for money.
43. The governors are very committed and supportive and share the school's vision of how it should operate in the community, raising standards, ethos and inclusion. All necessary policies are in place and reviewed regularly. Governors undertake training and do their best to fulfil their statutory duties, except for the daily act of collective worship. Governors have a keen sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the school gained from reports on standards. Each department in the school has a link governor who spends time in school observing and working with staff. This gives governors a very good insight into school life. The governors act as a critical friend to the school leadership and do challenge them on a variety of matters. The governors are actively involved in strategic planning. Governors led the recent recovery plan to reduce the revenue deficit and ensured employment and spending decisions were based firmly on curriculum need.

Sixth form

44. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Sixth formers enjoy many successes and most students appreciate the experience and move on to appropriate higher education courses or employment. The careers provision is good and, while not always appreciated by the students, it has been thoughtfully planned, especially in terms of preparing students for their higher education applications. The governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and have a clear vision about how this provision might develop further. Their vision is similar to that of the head of sixth form.
45. A caring and supportive ethos has been established and students are advised well and realistically about their options when entering the sixth form. A suitable taught curriculum has been established and this caters very well for the students' needs, including providing for gifted and talented students. The school has a good record for Oxbridge entry, for example. There are two aspects of the present provision that could be improved to make the sixth form even more effective. Firstly, though there is much examination data available and there is a good awareness of the value added by sixth form study, this information is not used with consistency to inform students about their progress and what they need to do to improve. Sound monitoring procedures are in place, including half-termly interim reports, but various discussions with students indicated that while they have an awareness of their minimum target grades, they do not know with consistency how well they are doing in relation to their targets, or what they need to do to improve. Secondly, few enrichment opportunities exist. Students study their examination options but little else. Though there is a clear strategy for general studies in Year 12, other mechanisms to add breadth to the curriculum and sporting opportunities are severely limited. A number of students told inspectors that they would welcome better opportunities to participate in sporting activities.

CENTRE FOR SEVERE SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The provision of this feature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of the pupils involved is very good because of the skilful and committed teaching offered.
- The school's commitment to including all pupils helps to boost the confidence and self-esteem of the pupils educated in the centre.

- Classroom relationships are very good and create a very positive learning atmosphere in which pupils flourish.
- Targets on IEPs are not sufficiently measurable and review arrangements are not flexible enough in matching the differing amount of time needed for the achievement of different targets.

Commentary

46. The school operates a centre for pupils with severe specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Thirty places are funded by the LEA for pupils who mostly live within the school's catchment area, although some come from further afield. Pupils are integrated into mainstream teaching groups except for specialist teaching in English throughout the school and in mathematics in Years 7 and 8.
47. The pupils catered for by the centre achieve very well in comparison with their severe learning difficulties and grow in self-esteem and confidence. They make good progress in improving their reading and spelling ages, and achieve very well at GCSE. In 2003 four pupils gained seven GCSE grades A* to E and three gained five subjects at grades C to F, plus work-related qualifications. Pupils with very poor literacy skills all achieved grades in English language, and one pupil with severe learning difficulties gained grades in seven subjects. Pupils benefit greatly from following skilfully adapted GCSE courses and special arrangements agreed with the examination board, which allow them to achieve their best.
48. Pupils make very good progress in lessons. In a Year 10 English lesson for instance, pupils with dyslexia thoroughly enjoyed sharing the reading aloud of "Kes" showing good comprehension, recalling and predicting plots in the story. In a Year 7 lesson pupils made excellent progress in working accurately in measurement using centimetres and millimetres. Pupils are very well integrated and achieve well in mainstream lessons. They made very good progress in a Year 8 geography lesson for instance, in constructing a graph, and in a Year 8 history lesson in learning about features in medieval towns.
49. Teaching and learning are very good. Specialist teaching is often innovative and creative, resulting in pupils working with great enjoyment, being thoroughly absorbed in their work, and determined to succeed. Tasks provide good pace and challenge. A Year 7 English lesson, for example, challenged pupils to express their feelings about being involved in a number of situations they might experience. This led to a flow of imaginative vocabulary and spontaneous discussion. Learning was exciting and rewarding, and all made very good progress. In this and other lessons, pupils learnt very well because of the skilful match of work to their needs, skilled individual guidance, well judged challenge and constant encouragement and reassurance. Classroom relationships are very good and create a very positive learning atmosphere in which pupils flourish.
50. Teaching and learning are consistently good in nearly all subjects. Pupils' needs are well known and the good support of both subject teachers and teaching assistants enables them to make very good progress. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils' learning but there are lessons where pupils' learning is slower because there is no specialist support available. Pupils experience difficulties in learning in modern languages for instance, because of insufficient support and also because work is not sufficiently well matched to their learning needs. Teaching in mathematics is exceptionally good, with pupils' learning needs being very well known and met through detailed planning.
51. Pupils' learning needs are identified and their progress is monitored very closely through an appropriate range of standardised tests and other procedures. IEPs and Statements of Special Educational Needs are reviewed regularly and targets set for improvement. However, targets on IEPs are not sufficiently measurable and review arrangements are not flexible enough in matching the differing amount of time needed for the achievement of different targets.
52. The curriculum is fully inclusive. In addition to the full school curriculum, pupils have access to a very good range of provision, which is skilfully planned to meet their wide-ranging specific and severe learning needs. This includes: flexible arrangements for the withdrawal of pupils for specialist support including multi-sensory individual programmes, the adaptation of English National Curriculum and GCSE courses and the National Numeracy Strategy in Years 7 and 8, and flexible arrangements in Years 10 and 11 to offer learning opportunities through work-related courses. Enrichment is provided through lunchtime activities and the strong encouragement for pupils to take part in the school's extra-curricular programme. Resources are well chosen and used, but there is insufficient access to the use of computers. Teaching accommodation is attractive, welcoming and creates very good learning atmosphere.

53. Leadership and management are very good. The SENCO is deeply committed to ensuring that pupils achieve well through provision of the highest possible quality. She is highly skilled and has a very clear vision of the strategies needed to enable pupils with severe learning difficulties to succeed. She operates very efficient and effective systems to ensure that provision is very well planned and delivered. Staff are very well supported and guided. The deployment of teaching assistants, however, needs to be reviewed to ensure more consistent support for pupils across subjects. Very good progress has been since the last inspection in maintaining the very high standards identified at that time.

PROVISION IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The provision of this feature is **good**.

Main strength and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is good, resulting in a shared commitment to raising standards.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 because of good teaching.
- There are very good links with other schools, including primary schools, and this helps the learning of younger pupils.
- The recent reduction in time for language teaching in Year 10 does not support good language learning.
- Assessment is not sufficiently developed so that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- There are too few opportunities for ICT and wider reading.

Commentary

54. Results in the 2002 GCSE examinations were above average in French and Spanish and well below average in German. Girls performed better than boys in all three languages. Pupils tend to do better in their other subjects than in modern foreign languages. The lower than expected results in German were partly because of staffing difficulties, which have now been resolved.
55. Standards seen in Year 9 are above average in French and average in Spanish and German, the two second languages that pupils start in Year 8. This represents good achievement. In Year 9, all pupils speak confidently with good pronunciation and have good listening and reading comprehension skills. Higher attaining pupils in French are already able to use the past tense effectively in speaking and in writing. In German and Spanish, pupils can write short descriptive texts and give simple opinions. In Year 11 standards seen in French are above average and average in German and Spanish, which represents satisfactory achievement given the prior attainment of these pupils. Higher attaining pupils in all three languages can write accurately and at length, using a wide range of language. The written language of middle and lower attaining pupils contains more mistakes and a more restricted range of language, but still communicates meaning. Preparation for speaking tasks also shows a range of language over different topics. Pupils have good listening skills and higher attaining pupils can listen and respond to quite rapid authentic language. However, wider reading skills and responding to authentic materials in French, German and Spanish are less well developed.
56. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and use the foreign language effectively in the classroom, thus providing a good model for pupils' own language. Teachers plan a range of activities covering all skills and often with an emphasis on raising the standard of pupils' speaking skills. This ensures that both boys and girls contribute confidently to speaking activities. The pace of learning is brisk, pupils work well collaboratively and they have a positive attitude to language learning. Marking is good; it encourages, praises and gives focused advice on different aspects of pupils' language. However, the effective use of assessment so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve is not consistent.
57. The curriculum offered in modern foreign languages is good. However, despite a few good examples of work using ICT to support language learning, such opportunities are not sufficiently developed across the department. In Year 10, the double lessons in French and Spanish do not support good language learning. The two twilight lessons for German provide less time for language learning than in the other two languages.
58. The department is staffed by a team of very good linguists who all teach two languages. In addition there are three part-time foreign language assistants. Teachers use a range of activities to encourage good language learning, in particular speaking. The department is involved in a number of innovative projects,

which support the good teaching and learning, in particular the TALK speaking project and the Key Stage 3 framework. The quality of the leadership and management in the department is good and the targets in the departmental development plan are focused and appropriate. The department works well as a team and is well supported by the curriculum leader and the senior management team.

59. A strength of the department is its very good links with other schools and colleges. In particular, the primary languages initiative with six local primary schools and the links with a language college in Bristol with which the department is taking part in a research project, linking modern foreign languages with literacy.
60. Leadership is good with clear vision and it creates a strong team ethos. The department has a shared commitment to improve standards through a range of innovative projects and focused team targets. Departmental documentation and policies, including the schemes of work, are clear and followed consistently. However, in the schemes of work there are few suggested learning activities for different groups of pupils. This is sometimes reflected in teachers' lesson planning and in consequence the needs of all pupils are not best met. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The quality of teaching has improved, as have the attitudes and behaviour of pupils in language lessons.

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

- Girls have outperformed boys at GCSE but in 2003 results improved significantly, including those of boys.
- Recent Year 9 results have not been high enough. However, higher expectations and improved teaching and learning methods are beginning to raise standards. These developments need to be fully embedded.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- Day-to-day marking is good but teachers could make better use of assessment to help pupils understand how to improve.
- Lesson content and related issues make a very good contribution to the pupils' personal development.

Commentary

61. Results in the 2003 end of Year 9 tests were average. At the higher Level 6 and above the pupils did significantly better in mathematics and science than in English. Given their standards on entry, this outcome represents satisfactory achievement. In the 2003 English GCSE examination the proportion gaining grades A*-C was above the national average. This represents good achievement since the school enters a higher proportion of the year group than many schools. Overall standards were above average, as were the highest grades of A*/A. In English literature the proportion at grades A* to C was above the national average and overall standards were above average. This represents very good achievement given that the school enters more pupils than most schools. In both subjects the gap between girls and boys at grades A* to C was wider than in most schools.
62. For current pupils, standards in Year 9 are above average, representing good achievement. Standards have improved on recent results because of a sharper focus on the writing skills of the pupils, especially those who have the capacity to achieve the higher levels. A more effective implementation of National Literacy Strategy methods is leading to better progress throughout Years 7 to 9. As a result the proportion of pupils consistently demonstrating above average standards in writing is about twice that reflected in recent results. These pupils are writing with a better focus on using language powerfully. Their accuracy is good, although some need to be more careful. About one in four do not reach the expected Level 5 because of more frequent weaknesses in accuracy, writing organisation and expression. In Year 11 standards are above average, suggesting that the improvement in 2003 results can be sustained. This is good achievement. As in Years 7 to 9 pupils of all abilities in Years 10 to 11 are benefiting from a more explicit approach to the development of their skills. Detailed, analytical and forcefully argued writing characterises the work of higher attainers. Average attainers have good organisational skills but require more consistency in the accuracy of their first drafts to secure a consistent grade C standard. Good liaison between special educational needs and English staff enables pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. All pupils make satisfactory progress in developing ICT and numeracy skills.
63. The quality of teaching and learning is good with a significant amount that is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge that effectively helps the pupils develop skills in writing and knowledge about texts. The very good teaching and learning observed in the best lessons resulted from the highest expectations and very thorough planning of activities that clearly related to learning objectives. Activities were rigorously scheduled, so pace was added to a good sense of purpose. Varied teaching methods ensured pupils responded individually, in pairs and in groups, and sustained high levels of motivation and participation. However, in some lessons there was not enough skilful organisation of oral work so pupils did not have enough opportunities for independent and collaborative thinking and discussion. Occasionally, the pace was too slow, because of a lack of rigour in the timing of tasks. In some average-attaining groups not enough attention was paid to improving the written accuracy of borderline C/D pupils. Marking is accurate and informative. However, though pupils receive minimum level and grade targets, they are

seldom secure about how precisely to achieve them. In some cases the targets have already been attained and not replaced with new, challenging targets.

64. Leadership and management are good and have led the momentum to improve standards. The head of department and his deputy share a clear vision for further improvement. Careful evaluation of results has prompted the department to embark on a planned policy of raising standards through revised schemes of work and methods of learning. An evolutionary pace of change has resulted in good support from a department containing a blend of youth and experience. Consistency of good practice is emerging, although it requires securing, while the very best practice requires extension. The well-chosen texts challenge the pupils' thinking. Lessons make a significant contribution to the pupils' personal development because of a strong focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Results at GCSE have improved, standards are improving and teaching and learning methods are more effective, so there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

65. Standards of literacy are above average in Years 7 to 11. In many subjects pupils demonstrate above average standards in speaking and listening. This consolidates their accurate use of subject vocabulary. Most pupils read fluently and possess effective study skills, skimming and scanning texts with confidence. Standards of writing are above average. Most written work is well presented. Many pupils transfer the good foundations for writing developed in their English lessons to their other subjects. They organise work effectively into paragraphs, which enhances clarity of communication. Higher attainers not only write accurately but purposefully seek to engage the reader's interest through well-selected vocabulary. The accuracy of some work is below average with errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. A very small proportion is well below average, reflected in frequency of errors and short responses.
66. The overall teaching and learning of literacy skills are satisfactory. The school has a literacy group, which initiates developments under the auspices of a coordinator. As yet there is no ratified whole school policy although a concise draft version has been formulated. An audit of provision in subjects has been carried out but its potential to inform further developments has not been fully realized. Teachers in some subjects are very explicit in their approach to literacy development and this enhances performance in their areas. High expectations and strong provision enable pupils to make good progress in their application and understanding of conceptual terms in mathematics, art, religious education, physical education and science. Development of reading skills is satisfactory. The most significant area of inconsistency related to writing. The good practice observed in religious education that provided explicit guidance and feedback for the pupils' writing was not prevalent across all subjects, particularly with regard to a more consistent approach to marking of spelling and grammar.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The report on modern foreign languages is to be found in the special features section on page 24 of this report.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in mathematics are well above average throughout the school.
- Pupils achieve results that are much better than expected from their attainment at the start of their courses as a result of teaching that is consistently highly effective.
- Leadership is excellent and the department is very well managed. Strengths and weaknesses are known, and there is a shared commitment to excellence.
- Standards have improved significantly, especially in the recent past.
- Pupils are well aware of their expected grades at the end of the course, but do not always know in detail how to further improve their learning.

Commentary

67. Results in national tests in 2003 at the end of Year 9 were above the national average, but were in line with those in similar schools. The 2003 results were much better than those of 2002 and exceeded the school's target. The number achieving Level 6 or above was especially high. Boys' results were better than girls'. These results are better than in English and science and represent very good achievement. GCSE results in 2003 were well above national standards and show a significant improvement on results in 2002. The school's analyses show very good achievement given pupils' results in national tests two years earlier. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection.
68. Standards on entry are above average. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are well above average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils' work covers the range of attainment expected, with many more pupils working at higher levels and fewer at lower levels than seen nationally. Standards are consistent across different aspects of mathematics and pupils are able to use and apply the skills they learn in number and algebra as well as in shape and space and handling data. Pupils learn new skills and concepts quickly and develop a very secure understanding of concepts. There are no significant differences in achievement for different groups of pupils or for those with special educational needs. Achievement is improving and is very good in all years.
69. Teaching is very good overall and is consistently highly effective. Teachers have in-depth knowledge of pupils' likely difficulties and they specifically tailor their teaching to address these. Planning of schemes and topics is excellent. Teachers work together to find and share activities that will interest pupils. They have very high expectations of their pupils and lessons proceed at a very good pace. They are enthusiastic and manage pupils very well to secure a highly purposeful atmosphere, a commitment to learning and an enjoyment of mathematics. In the very best lessons, assessment is used to adjust the activities and provide more support or challenge to individuals. For example in a Year 7 lesson, after a brief introduction by the teacher, pupils were asked to rate their understanding. This enabled the teacher to provide immediate support to those who were having difficulty while others proceeded to a suitably challenging task. No time was lost. In the very few lessons where teaching is less than good, the work planned is too difficult or too easy for the pupils and this is not redressed. Although assessment arrangements are good, pupils are not fully involved in the process and do not always understand how they can improve their work.
70. Pupils' literacy is developed through regular use, definition and spelling of technical vocabulary and through encouraging pupils to reason orally to justify their answers. Their skills are good. Teachers use ICT very well to improve presentation and provide internally written individual teaching programmes. ICT is less well used in developing pupils' own skills in spreadsheets and modelling.
71. Leadership is excellent and the department is very well managed. There is a thorough, thoughtful and methodical approach, which has secured excellent improvement since the last inspection. Staff show a strong, shared commitment to excellence and a willingness to experiment and develop further. Many of

the staff are relatively new and through excellent induction they are now contributing to consistently high standards and the development of teaching and the curriculum. Department leaders have a very good knowledge of what they do very well and what needs improvement and they act on this information. Systems such as for monitoring pupils' progress and constructing schemes of work are all highly effective and focused on pupils' achievement.

72. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The school's recently acquired status as a specialist mathematics and computing college is already having an impact. Teachers have established excellent partnerships with primary schools, which ensure that pupils have exactly the right challenge at the start of Year 7. The department has good resources to enhance learning, especially digital projectors, software and computers.

Mathematics across the curriculum

73. Standards of numeracy in Years 7 to 11 are very good and standards of teaching numeracy in subjects other than mathematics are good. There is a clear numeracy policy and common approaches have been developed to topics such as graph work and handling data. There is a rolling programme to agree work with other departments. This has led to very good graph work in geography, competent use of number in German and good use of formulae in science. In other subjects such as design and technology, there is no policy and opportunities to use and develop mathematical skills are lost.

Specialist College status

74. The school has very recently been designated as a specialist mathematics and computing college and this is already having an impact on its links with the community. The school works very constructively with its partner primary schools. For example, mathematics teachers provide extension lessons for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and these pupils also visit Hardenhuish to make use of the ICT facilities. Pupils work on a common project from late in Year 6 to early in Year 7. The school already shares aspects of sixth form provision with a partner secondary school and is helping a new school establish expertise in GCSE teaching. An innovative programme with the youth service is developing ways to help unemployed and disadvantaged young people with numeracy and ICT skills. The school has many plans for further activities and its specialist status means it is well placed to address these.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, leading to good learning.
- There is a shared commitment to the continued raising of standards.
- The assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are very good.
- Learning is enhanced because of the very good accommodation and resources.
- The mentoring and support for new teachers needs to be extended and the sharing of good practice needs to be further developed..

Commentary

75. In 2003 results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations were above average. The results for 2003 have continued the steady improvement of the last three years. Pupils enter the school with average standards of prior attainment and the progress they make by the end of Year 9 indicates good achievement and this is maintained through Years 10 and 11. At the end of Year 9 boys and girls are attaining equally but in the GCSE the girls attained a higher standard than the boys. Data analysis by the school indicates, however, that there is no significant difference in boys' and girls' achievement. At the end of Year 9 higher attaining pupils are confident in the use of scientific apparatus, are able to plan a complex scientific investigation and can express themselves well using scientific terms. Lower attaining pupils can analyse results and present them in graphical form with some skill but are less confident in the handling of numerical calculations. By the end of Year 11 higher attaining pupils have a good grasp of concepts such as chemical formulae and can calculate these with ease and lower attaining pupils understand the significance of many scientific principles, particularly those applied to themselves and to

the environment. Literacy skills are guided where appropriate by the support of writing frames and developed by the use of some imaginative writing. In class pupils are encouraged to answer questions fully and to express themselves clearly. The Internet is used as a carefully guided resource for research by all pupils, who are adept at finding information.

76. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are also above average for present pupils in Year 9 and in Year 11. They are learning new skills and developing their understanding of various scientific concepts and, overall, all are making good progress in their learning, including pupils with special educational needs. The school's own value added analysis indicates that present pupils in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well.
77. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Nearly all lessons were at least satisfactory, with many being good or better. There was one excellent lesson. In particular the teaching and learning occurring in the lessons of the more experienced teachers were very good. In Years 7 to 9 lessons are well prepared, time and class management are good and pupils' interest and enthusiasm are captured by a stimulating variety of practical work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well: they are occasionally supported by a teaching assistant and are helped by the issuing of appropriate handouts and guides from the teachers. They are also often well supported by other pupils. Homework is well used to support, reinforce and develop the work covered in class. In Years 10 and 11 pupils are taught by a range of teachers to make best use of the teachers' particular areas of specialist knowledge. This means that pupils' individual lessons are very effective but there is a loss of continuity for a group. Assessment procedures are already well developed and used and pupils are well aware of both their targets and their present performance. Teaching is well supported by the laboratory technicians. Pupils worked co-operatively with each other and with their teachers and, in Years 10 and 11, were able to maintain their concentration for the whole length of a long double period. However, the long double lesson sometimes proved to be too much for pupils in Years 7 to 9.
78. Leadership and management are good and the shared determination to continue the raising of standards is an indication of this. There are some very experienced teachers in the department and it is important that their skills are used to develop the expertise of the younger members of the department. The mentoring and support offered needs to be extended. Work schemes are thorough and effective and are constantly being reviewed. Pupils' progress is monitored carefully and accurately using teachers' assessments. End of topic tests and guidance sheets for pupils to give them specific ways to raise their standard of work are already being used. The school has its own farm. Centrally placed, this provides an invaluable addition to the facilities of the school and contributes well to the personal development of the pupils. Year 7 pupils, in particular, use it to follow reproduction and development for both sheep and hens. It is a facility also shared by other schools and there are visits from local primary schools and a special school. Science accommodation has been significantly improved recently and the department is well resourced. This is typical of the good progress that has been made since the last inspection and which is raising standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising because of improved time allocation to the subject.
- Teaching from the new team of specialist teachers is good and pupils learn well.
- The large number of computers is having a positive impact on learning.
- Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently established as a mechanism for improving standards.

Commentary

79. Results in the GNVQ intermediate examination in 2003 were similar to the national average. As these pupils started their course with below average levels of prior attainment, their achievement is good, as they secured an improvement in standards. There was no discernible difference in attainment based on gender; boys and girls gained similar grades.

80. For present pupils, standards in Year 11 are average but are rising because of the good teaching they receive from the new team of ICT teachers. Their skills at presenting information using a word processor or desktop publisher are good. Pupils' knowledge of most other ICT strands is average, save for their understanding of databases, which is under-developed. Present standards in Year 9 are below average because in the past the pupils were largely taught by non-specialist ICT teachers and learned their computer skills through a variety of subjects on the curriculum. Standards are now rapidly rising because pupils now attend specialist ICT lessons. Their achievement is satisfactory. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 use word processing and desk top publishing well to communicate their ideas. The slide shows they produce are of a satisfactory standard, with most pupils thinking carefully about how best to display information. Higher attaining pupils use animation well to enhance their slides but few can automate their presentations. Pupils' database skills are below average. Their understanding and use of spreadsheets is rapidly improving and Year 9 pupils can enter simple formulas correctly. All pupils clearly understand the dangers of posting personal information on the Internet but their understanding of how computers affect our lives in other ways is not secure. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers in all years.
81. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils learn new computing skills because teachers make the work exciting and challenging. Good use of resources accelerates learning. For example, Year 7 pupils gained good understanding of the use of type and colour in slide presentations because the teacher used well prepared examples. Class management is very good and pupils behave well. As teachers usually set demanding time limits, pupils complete much work in lessons, though occasionally, lesson introductions over run and pupils do not have enough time to practise their individual computer skills.
82. Leadership and management are good and the new leadership structure is already having a positive impact on standards. Coursework in Years 10 and 11 is now very well assessed and pupils really appreciate the detailed written feedback they receive from teachers that shows them how they can improve their work. As a result many are re-submitting their presentations to gain higher marks. However, work in Years 7 to 9 is not assessed as thoroughly and the pupils' achievements are restricted as they receive less clear guidance on how they might improve. The lessons and clubs held after school and in the holidays greatly improve the learning of the many pupils who attend. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection: standards have improved, teaching and learning are now good and pupils have far better access to computers.

ICT across the curriculum

83. Computers are widely used across the curriculum. Pupils regularly use their ICT communication and research capabilities in a good variety of lessons but have too few opportunities to practise and hone other computer skills and the school does not have a co-ordinated, planned approach to this work. Pupils use word processing and desktop publishing skilfully to present their work in a good number of subjects both in the main school and in the sixth form. Other computers skills are occasionally developed: pupils e-mail in German, practising the use of short cut keys for accents. In physical education pupils use heart monitors to measure the effect of exercise on the body. Many teachers are making very good use of the digital projectors to promote and enhance learning. The school is well placed to extend the range of its ICT work because computer resources are very good. The school computer network is also well serviced and very stable.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall, the provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average as a result of very good teaching: girls' results were very high.
- GCSE pupils achieve very well.
- The curriculum is broad and extended through fieldwork opportunities in each year.
- The assessment of attainment and progress is unsatisfactory because reliable systems have not been established.
- There are weaknesses in the quality of written work in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

84. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above average and were an improvement on those gained in 2002, though in 2002, girls performed better than boys and their results were in the top five per cent nationally. Given their prior attainment, achievement overall was very good.
85. **Standards are above average.** In Year 9, pupils have a sound foundation of geographical skills. They have a broad range of technical vocabulary and understand about world development issues. They know where places are located, particularly regions that are a focus for study, such as Brazil. Standards are above average but weaknesses are evident in written work because pupils do not give sufficient explanation in answers. Pupils achieve well but have substantial gains in map skills; they improve understanding about the development of countries and have an appreciation of the ethical aspects of world trade.
86. By the end of Year 11 pupils are knowledgeable on a broad range of topics. They read and interpret weather charts and show good research skills in studies of Chippenham. They are able to work independently, and reports are well structured and presented. Work is improved through word processing but grammatical inaccuracies reduce the quality of writing of a minority of pupils. Most pupils achieve very well and by the end the Year 11 standards are well above average. They improve their understanding of topics, particularly in physical geography but do not make enough use of illustrative material to support writing.
87. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. In Years 7 to 9 pupils benefit by being taught by subject specialists and consequently they achieve well on the course. The aims of lessons are clear but the outcomes are not consistently reinforced through summary sessions. The most effective lessons are characterised by teachers setting challenging tasks and engaging pupils actively in learning. In a Year 9 lesson for example, learning was excellent because pupils were set thought-provoking tasks about the effects of earthquakes. Pupils worked cooperatively, researched information and prepared high quality reports. Work is regularly marked but there is insufficient evaluation of the content and targets for improvement are rarely set. Arrangements to assess and track pupils' progress against National Curriculum levels need refining as reliable systems are not established. By the end of Year 11 pupils have achieved very well in developing skills in organising and presenting assignments because teachers emphasise these in lessons. Teachers are experienced and pupils are very well prepared for the examination so they reach high standards. Occasionally, however, teachers talk for long periods, pupils tire and learning slows. Pupils benefit from participating in fieldwork study and this enables them to apply their theoretical knowledge.
88. The subject is well led and managed and new teachers are appropriately supported and deployed. The development plan is well linked to the school's objectives but the schemes of work do not give sufficient guidance to teachers on the programmes of study. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good and provide a clear direction for the department.
- Teachers enable pupils to take an active part in lessons; as a result achievement is very good.
- Research projects enable pupils to develop research and organisational skills.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not understand the criteria for the National Curriculum levels and are not involved in the assessment of their work.
- There is insufficient planned use of ICT as a learning tool.
- Pupils studying for GCSE do not have textbooks for private study.

Commentary

89. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were well above average. All pupils entered achieved at least a pass grade. Data analysis by the school shows that achievement of girls was excellent. Girls' achievement was significantly higher than that for boys. The proportion of boys achieving grades A* to C

was above average and achievement was good. The proportion of boys, however, achieving the highest grades A*/A was low. Achievement overall was very good.

90. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement given their standards at the start of the course. Pupils make gains in their knowledge of such topics as the causes of the First World War and, in extended writing projects, they demonstrate research and investigation skills. They select and extract information from written sources in response to questions and higher attaining pupils use it to make judgements that they are beginning to support with reasons. They empathise with people from the times they study, such as the slaves of the American plantations, and most can write accounts demonstrating sensitivity and understanding of their plight. They use sources to gain information, though there is little evidence of the evaluation of the source itself. Lower attaining pupils identify relevant information using illustrations and text; however, their recall is weak. The achievement of a small minority of pupils is limited by lack of concentration and poor attitudes to learning. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good.
91. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average. This represents very good achievement given their prior attainment. Effective revision strategies and well-planned local studies play a significant role in achieving this standard. They make good progress in their learning and their local history project demonstrates good observational and investigative skills. Information is presented logically and clearly, and higher attaining pupils compare different sources in order to achieve accurate information. Pupils demonstrate understanding of the factors that affect the development of medicine, and most can identify the links between them.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have high expectations and as a result pupils are encouraged to achieve very well. Lessons are well planned to involve pupils and questions are designed to encourage pupils to use the information they gain rather than just note it. Teachers use quick starter activities to energise pupils and to reinforce their prior learning. The key issues of the lessons are identified at the start, enabling them to focus on significant points. All pupils are encouraged to analyse information and to make judgements that they are encouraged to support with evidence. Marking is regular and constructive, recognising success while identifying areas for development. Pupils review their grades, although they are not involved in their assessment. Pupils are not familiar with the requirements of National Curriculum levels and they are only used at the end of Year 9. Pupils following the GCSE course receive good advice, although they are not involved in self-assessment. This would enable them to develop the skills to review work in progress. Teachers set imaginative tasks for homework and respond to different types of learning styles. The lack of individual textbooks for home use, however, limits the preparation and development opportunities of pupils on the GCSE course. ICT has not yet been developed as an integral part of the course and the use of statistics and numerical data that would extend their mathematical skills is still being developed.
93. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The department is committed to raising standards. Planning is detailed and the department is developing its assessment procedures. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards were well above average in the 2002 GCSE course.
- Teaching is very good and contributes very well to pupil achievement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Assessment of pupils' work and the monitoring of work in the subject is very well developed.
- Insufficient time is allocated to the general religious education course in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

94. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average in relation to the Wiltshire LEA Agreed Syllabus. In Years 10 and 11, standards in the work seen are also above average in the statutory general course; however, the limited amount of curriculum time in the general course does not fully enable pupils to learn from religion

as well as they might. Standards in the GCSE course were well above average in 2003. Over 90 per cent of pupils gained grades A* to C. These outcomes were well above average and represent very good achievement. By Year 11, pupils have developed skills of analysis and evaluation and their research skills are very good.

95. In Years 7 to 9 standards are above average and there are some very good examples of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. All achieve well, including pupils with special educational needs. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work enable pupils to improve their speaking and listening skills. The use of a wide range of teaching styles enables pupils to *learn from* as well as *learn about* religion. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average and the teachers' excellent knowledge of the subject enables pupils to achieve very well in the GCSE course.
96. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Very good use of questioning, characterised by the teacher's awareness of the needs of the individual, allows pupils to extend their understanding of how they can learn from religion and apply it in their lives. In one Year 11 lesson, pupils showed a very clear understanding of the issues involved in euthanasia and their ability to articulate their views was very well developed. Homework is used very well to allow pupils to reflect on the information they have gained in class. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to succeed. The assessment procedures provide a clear basis for assessing what pupils know and understand. The subject does set detailed targets against which it can assess pupils' progress, but these need to be shared with pupils. However, pupils know from the detailed comments in their books about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve.
97. Leadership and management are very good, with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of the department approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment. He has been very successful in developing a strong and supportive team. The monitoring of the work of teachers and pupils is well developed. The subject is managed very well and this is reflected in the rich diet of religious education provided. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and awareness are particularly strong, demonstrating a clear respect for the views, faiths and traditions of each other.
98. Since the last inspection standards have improved. Good improvements have been made in planning and in the schemes of work. The hard work of the curriculum leader has achieved great credibility for the subject. The quality of teaching has also improved. However, the limited amount of time given to the subject in Years 10 and 11 continues to be a cause for concern. Overall, the improvements since the last inspection have had a good impact on standards, pupils' achievement and progress.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is very good and provides a clear vision for the continual development of the subject.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 because of the very good teaching.
- The accommodation provides an excellent environment for learning.
- More emphasis on developing the pupils' literacy skills is needed in Years 7 to 9.
- Learning objectives are not identified within medium and short term planning and are not communicated to the pupils.

Commentary

99. Standards of work in teacher-assessed tests at the end of Year 7 in 2003 were above average. Pupils started their course in Year 7 with average standards, so their achievement is good. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average, being similar to those in 2002. These outcomes indicate that pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieved very well.

100. The work of present pupils in Year 9 is above average. Again achievement is good because on entry to the school in Year 7, attainment is average because their previous experience of design and technology is limited. Standards are well above average in Year 11. Achievement is good as standards continue to rise, though this is more obvious in Year 11 than in Year 10. This simply reflects the greater confidence associated with pupils who are over a year into their examination course. As Year 10 pupils gain in confidence and understanding, it is likely that achievement will improve further.
101. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall; it is good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The scheme of work for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 progressively builds on pupils' knowledge and skills, encourages increasing creativity and independence and excites the pupils. Teachers are skilled and knowledgeable. They inspire pupils through their demonstrations. Pupils are very interested, concentrate intently and are well motivated. All teachers keep up to date in the development of their subject knowledge and readily share their learning with colleagues and pupils to have a positive effect on what pupils learn and achieve. This enables the pupils to use the latest technology in the manufacture of their designs. Where assessment is good, it confirms where learning has occurred and guides pupils to extend their learning. Test marks and teachers' assessments are recorded on the school network and available to all teachers for use in target setting, but are not always shared with pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well, though occasionally in some lessons their progress is slowed because of a lack of additional support. The most able pupils are challenged more in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 teachers do not always plan to extend the learning of pupils, particularly those who are identified as gifted and talented. In general more emphasis needs to be placed on written work and developing pupils' literacy skills in Years 7 to 9. Very good use is made of ICT in teaching and this helps learning. The use of data projectors increases the quality of teachers' presentations and is used innovatively to demonstrate working models to enthuse pupils. Pupils use ICT to improve the presentation of their work, to design, research, analyse the results of surveys and manufacture. Higher attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 transfer knowledge they have learnt in other areas of the curriculum, for example in science. More attention needs to be given to setting learning objectives and planning learning outcomes. They should be made clear to pupils at the beginning of every lesson and plenaries should give pupils opportunities to demonstrate, and teachers to check, what has been learned.
102. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The head of faculty provides the vision for the subject and sets the standards for the quality of teaching and aspirations for pupils' work and achievements. There is a clear view of the faculty's strengths and areas for development and a culture of continuous improvement. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection, helped by the significant improvements in accommodation, which is now excellent. The faculty has moved into a new purpose-built centre; it provides the highest quality of accommodation and resources for teaching and a place where pupils enjoy learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The focus was on art and design and music, though two lessons in drama were sampled. Teaching and learning were very good, standards were well above average and the pupils achieved very well during these lessons.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and pupils develop good levels of skill in two-dimensional work, particularly in painting and drawing.
- Achievement in the current Year 11 is good.
- The breadth and balance in the curriculum has improved since the last report.
- Insufficient curriculum time in Year 7 to 9 has an adverse impact on pupils' achievement.
- The lack of ICT in the department restricts the range of pupils' learning and they do not have proper access to computers in any year.
- The very small proportion of pupils, especially of boys, taking art and design in Years 10 and 11 is of concern.

Commentary

103. Only small numbers of pupils study art and design in Years 10 and 11 and very few of them are boys. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations based on the attainment of A* to C grades were average and similar results were recorded in 2002. Given the pupils' starting point in Year 10, this represents good achievement, though girls did better than boys.
104. Although pupils in the current Year 7 are working at an above average level, skills and understanding are average on entry to the school. Standards are still average at the end of Year 9. Although they often achieve well in lessons, pupils do not have enough time, either in the 50-minute lessons or overall across Years 7 to 9, to achieve as well as they could. The range of the curriculum in these years has improved since the time of the last report, but timetabling makes it particularly difficult for pupils to achieve well in three-dimensional work. Because the quality of teaching is high, pupils learn as well as constraints allow, and they achieve satisfactorily, especially in painting and drawing. Standards here are above average because these are more realistic media to develop in the time available. Standards of pupils' understanding about the context behind their projects, for example about famous artists and their work, are generally good by Year 9.
105. Attainment amongst the small numbers in Year 11 is above average and pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Standards remain better in two-dimensional work because of pupils' prior experience. Year 11 pupils annotate sketchbooks well to show good integration of research and history with their visual experiments. There are more pupils in Year 10, but in large classes, so each pupil has much less individual contact time with the teachers than is usual. Single lessons in Year 10 and 11 are unhelpful, but these years do have some doubles, so pupils can develop the expected depth in their practical work.
106. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is often very good in lessons, showing very good pace as staff strive to include all required elements into their sessions. The impact of this effort is frustrated because pupils have to clear up practical work too soon for them to develop the depth they could achieve. The three-part lesson gives pupils interesting, varied "starter" activities, which allow them to interact together, often in "games" and quizzes about previous learning. Teachers' own art skills are very good, so pupils learn very effectively from well-organised demonstrations and expositions. Teachers take every other opportunity to make commendable use of very limited time. Staff prepare resources efficiently, for instance, so pupils can access them quickly. This necessarily reduces opportunities for pupils to become as independent of teachers as they could be. Very good marking focuses pupils clearly on what they need to do to improve work.
107. The department is well led and managed. The department has not benefited from many whole school developments, for instance the acquisition of ICT. Pupils have no access in the department to ICT for creative use in their work. Teachers want to include computer work in this way, but as ICT suites are very busy, they cannot ensure that all pupils will get the chance to use them. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good and energetic leadership and management provide a clear vision.
- The high quality of teaching and learning is rewarded with comparable achievement.
- The music curriculum throughout the school is broad, balanced and very well delivered.
- Extra-curricular provision is very rich, including 12 per cent of the school who enjoy music tuition.
- Satisfactory standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving but constrained by shortage of time.

Commentary

108. Very well above average results in GCSE continue a rising trend. Given pupils' prior levels of attainment, their achievements are very good. On entry to the school, pupils' standards of attainment in music are poor, often far less than national expectations at the end of Year 6. Standards are average by the end of Year 9, representing very good achievement, though a few pupils have difficulty with some important musical concepts. The majority have greater confidence in singing and playing both as individuals and in larger groups. The focus of pupils' attention, especially when listening to music, is significantly better and provides a secure foundation for those who elect to follow GCSE courses. By the end of Year 11, pupils' musical skills are very well developed; standards are above average, achievement is very good and this is reflected in the increasing numbers electing to pursue A Level music.
109. Teaching and learning in music throughout the school are very good. In all year groups, the impact of very well qualified teachers and expert musicians is clearly seen in very detailed planning, preparation and presentation of lessons. Teachers' very high expectations of pupils' engagement with music in performing, composing and critical listening are characterised by unusual levels of energy and dynamism coupled with sensitivity to the needs of individuals. This engenders very positive attitudes, behaviour and attention to the task in hand by pupils who clearly value their music lessons highly. Lapses in such very high standards were very rare and very well managed by the teachers. Consequently every lesson observed had positive outcomes, especially in the very high levels of achievement seen. Music staff and pupils demonstrate their enjoyment of music-making and their commitment to the life of the whole school by their involvement in a wide range of instrumental and vocal ensembles, performing in school concerts and productions and further afield in the local community.
110. The department is very well led with very clear vision and unusually high levels of commitment and energy. Management is very good. Planning for improvement is very well sustained beyond the recent provision of new accommodation and resources. Teachers' contributions to the specifications have been important. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. The very high expectations of teachers are now improving standards rapidly.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is good and provides good systems and procedures.
- Pupils enhance their skills through very good extra-curricular provision.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, which helps their learning.
- Lesson planning does not always focus on what pupils should learn and this constrains standards and achievement especially in non-examination classes.
- Analysis of assessment data should inform lesson planning and target setting.

Commentary

111. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were above average in physical education and in line in dance. Girls and boys overall performed at the same level. Pupils tended to do better in physical education than in other subjects that they take. Given the pupils' prior attainment, their achievement is good. .
112. When pupils enter the school, standards are below average. Standards are average by the end of Year 9, representing good achievement. By the end of Year 9, pupils' knowledge, understanding and performance in rugby, for example, is average: they use basic techniques to perform passing and catching skills and are developing knowledge of the contact situation through the maul. Their understanding of terminology used in rugby is above average, which represents very good progress given their limited experience of rugby in their previous schools. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average: achievement is good and pupils' practical skills are well developed. They can perform basic techniques in most major sports and many can transfer these to game situations. In dance pupils had a good knowledge of the components of movement, though some had difficulty in relating these to examples. Activities planned by teachers do not challenge pupils enough in physical education lessons taken by all pupils. Standards and achievement are below those of examination groups. Assessment related to National Curriculum levels is now in place and is helping to improve standards.
113. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good lessons in Years 7 to 9, where pupils particularly benefit from very knowledgeable teachers. Teachers target the work well to the standards the pupils are at, with pupils often working with different equipment and on different tasks. Where learning is not as good teachers move pupils to more advanced activities before they are ready to do so and pupils are not made aware of what they should achieve. In Years 10 and 11, GCSE pupils are engaged well in a variety of interesting and challenging activities, which motivate them and keep them on task. Teachers are well informed about the requirements of the courses they teach. Pupils do not have good independent learning skills and so have difficulties when set tasks involving them in taking responsibility for their own work. A large number of pupils enhance their performance in sport through a very good programme of extra-curricular sport.
114. Leadership and management are good. There are improving strategies to ensure that the department has a shared vision in order to raise standards more quickly. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards are higher and the quality of teaching has improved. Assessment systems and procedures are now in place. Analysis of this data should now take place to inform further curriculum development.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The focus subject was business studies. A Year 10 leisure and tourism lesson was also observed. Good, purposeful teaching and constant support and challenge enabled all pupils to achieve well.

Business studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high at GCSE and pupils achieve very well as a result of the way in which teachers provide a high level of challenge and very good pace in their lessons.
- Attitudes to learning are very positive and teaching is good. As a result, students achieve very well.
- Coursework in the subject provides a real stimulus and challenge for students.
- There remain opportunities to develop further the use of ICT to promote learning in the subject.
- Links with business are under-developed.

Commentary

115. Results at GCSE in 2003 were well above average. The performance of boys was particularly high and, overall, achievement was very good. Pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 are confident learners and understand the specialist terminology of the subject and the main concepts. They show a good understanding of finance and accounting topics such as profit and loss and break-even analysis, using their numeracy skills well in this area of the subject. They can apply their knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts and they communicate well. Pupils make at least good progress in lessons and they are achieving very well in relation to their prior attainment.
116. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are confident and effective. They prepare their lessons well and provide very effective whole class teaching, using questioning well in order to involve pupils, developing their interest in the subject and inculcating an understanding of key concepts and terms. Teachers build on previous work and provide a high level of challenge. They support pupils well and are approachable. Teachers provide a range of learning activities within a lesson and the homework set extends learning. Their use of case studies, often textbook based, in the classroom is good, but the use of business partnerships to support learning is under-developed. Pupils use ICT effectively to present their GCSE coursework, which is of a very good standard, but there are insufficient opportunities provided for students to use ICT for research and the analysis of data during the normal course of their learning. Pupils achieve very well because of the good teaching they receive allied to their own very positive attitudes and desire to succeed.
117. The curriculum leader of business studies manages the department well; he provides very clear vision and direction. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards are much higher and the quality of teaching is improved, though there is still scope to develop the use of ICT to promote learning in the subject and to develop partnerships with the business community to provide good contexts for learning about business.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is very good and provides a clear vision.
- The very good management of resources, communication across the school and links with the community, all help learning.
- The commitment and enthusiasm of staff is very good.
- There is a need to ensure that provision is made in all subjects.

Commentary

118. The school is committed and enthusiastic about the development of citizenship. Standards are above average. Pupils have very good knowledge and understanding of social and moral responsibility, involvement in the community and political literacy.
119. In Years 7 to 9 achievement is very good. Pupils develop their skills of working cooperatively with others and make decisions that take account of others' feelings and values through the personal, social and health education programme and work in most subjects and extra-curricular activities. In Years 10 and 11 pupils achievement is very good. Pupils develop an understanding of the community through links with universities and industry, though the latter is not as well developed as might be expected in business studies.
120. Teaching and learning of citizenship takes place in most subjects. Teaching is very good. Pupils learn through a range of activities that develop their knowledge and understanding but also develop their learning and personal skills. In Years 7 to 9 pupils take responsibility for assessing achievement in citizenship in tutor time. This enables teachers to monitor the quality of assessment.
121. Leadership and management are very good. A group, including a deputy headteacher, a head of year and the newly appointed citizenship coordinator, has done good development work. The work was started two years ago. They now have a very good vision for how citizenship should be taught in the school. Systems and procedures for training staff, developing materials and links with the community are very good. Very good development plans are in place, which include a review of work done so far. This should help to ensure that sufficient provision is made in all subjects.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

During the inspection 13 subjects were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. A key strength of the school's provision is the excellent course retention rates. Most courses have 100 per cent retention rates and a minimum of 90 per cent.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	6	66.7	90	16.7	42.7	25	39
Biology	7	85.7	81.6	0	33.2	28.6	33.2
English Literature	9	100	94.4	11.1	37.9	27.8	38.9
Design and Technology	6	100	89.2	33.3	32	35	35.7
Geography	18	94.4	88.3	38.9	36.4	39.4	36.3
History	5	80	91.8	40	37.2	32	37.8
Mathematics	7	71.4	74.2	42.9	34.3	30	31.3
Physics	5	80	82	0	36.2	24	34.3
Religious Education	7	85.7	90.9	14.3	38.9	30	37.9

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	25	100	91.6	40	36.3	84	74.1
Business Studies	11	100	96.4	63.6	32.8	90.9	76.5
Chemistry	10	100	94	50	45.9	88	81.1
Drama	6	100	98.1	66.7	41.5	103.3	82.9
English/English Language	12	100	98.3	33.3	36.5	80	80.1
English Literature	20	100	98.5	40	43.7	78	84.3
Design and Technology	22	100	95.3	50	35.5	88.2	76.5
Geography	30	96.7	97.1	36.7	40.5	78	80.9
History	13	100	97.1	46.2	41	86.2	81.2
Mathematics	15	100	93.3	66.7	52.2	104	84.7
Music	10	100	97.7	30	41.8	76	82.2
Physics	12	100	92.8	66.7	42.8	105	78.6
Religious Education	12	100	96.3	66.7	44	96.7	82.2
Sports/PE Studies	7	100	95.4	42.9	29.5	80	73.2

Information Technology AVCE	20	97.5	84.3	30	24.5	76.5	64.3
Leisure and Recreation	6	100	86.9	33.3	12.7	76.7	58.3
Travel and Tourism	17	100	88.1	29.4	15.7	82.4	61.4

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus subject was English literature. The combined English language and literature course was also sampled. Students are progressing well in both Years 12 and 13. Teaching was very good overall. Some inventive and engaging methods were observed, backed up by very good resources. Standards are above average and achievement is good. A Year 12 lesson in French was sampled. Very good teaching ensured that students were using and responding confidently to a wide range of language in the context of the topic of smoking. The students demonstrated a positive attitude to language learning and worked well both collaboratively and independently.

English literature

The provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 13 are well above average, reflecting 2003 AS results.
- The students are highly motivated and inspired by teaching that is never less than very good. Their attitudes are excellent.
- Teaching methods enthuse and challenge the students and provide many effective opportunities for independent work.
- Many students write at a very high standard but some need to develop a more precise written expression.

Commentary

122. In the 2002 A Level literature examination results were broadly average with no significant difference between male and female candidates. Their achievement was satisfactory. Results have fluctuated in previous years in relation to the national averages but were well above average in 1999 and 2001. Results improved in 2003: half of the small entry achieved grade A. In the 2002 AS examination the overall average grade was broadly average but the proportion at the higher grades of A and B was below average. There was a significant improvement in 2003, by nearly one whole grade. Recruitment to the course is good and the completion rate very good.
123. Standards in Year 13 are well above average and the students' achievement is good. Most are on target to achieve the higher grades of A and B. These students have developed very secure and highly competent analytical writing skills, confirmed by their standards of their Year 12 course work. Frequent references to the text support their arguments. Early assignments on 'The Color Purple' revealed detailed insights into how the author's manipulation of language conveys character development. Their choice of vocabulary and range of expression is mature and convincing. Those students who are not reaching these high standards show in discussion secure knowledge of both themes and literary conventions. Their writing does not always match their oral work in terms of insight and understanding. It is also undermined by some technical inaccuracy and a lack of precise expression. They occasionally tend to paraphrase the text rather than analysing it. Students in Year 12 are adapting very successfully to the increased demands of the course. They tackled with relish close analysis of Chaucer and their knowledge of contemporary attitudes and values is already strong.
124. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have high aspirations for their students. Consequently activities are challenging and both engage and motivate students during lessons. Lesson and curriculum planning are very good and closely linked to each learning objective. Challenge was a consistent feature in class. One Year 12 student led the analysis of extracts from 'The Miller's Tale' and the supportive contributions from other students helped all to make very good progress. In a lesson on 'The Color Purple' students collaborated very well in pairs to prepare their thoughts on the novel's narrative voice. Then, the whole group participated enthusiastically in a lively review of each other's opinions. Learning was enhanced by the teacher's finely judged open-ended interventions, which drew students further into

articulating their views. Marking is very informative and teachers make sure students know what they have to achieve through a clear focus on each unit's learning objectives. The teacher's specialist knowledge is a real strength, which not only helps the students to extend their knowledge and deepen their understanding, but also helps them prepare well for examinations and course work.

Example of outstanding practice

The rate of progress was very fast when Year 13 students analysed Chaucer's use of rhetorical conventions in a lesson on the 'Pardoner's Tale'. A striking and particularly effective feature was the application of National Literacy Strategy learning methods in a post-16 context. Clearly explained and displayed learning objectives ensured all understood the lesson's purpose. Students quickly brainstormed examples of rhetorical conventions on A4 whiteboards and then, in pairs, used cards to match examples of the conventions to correct descriptors. The teacher's finely judged but brief interventions confirmed the security of the learning. Having listened to different readings of the same extract the students analysed in pairs hard copy to identify rhetorical devices and to evaluate their impact on the performance value of the piece. The pace was fast; the learning atmosphere focused. The teacher supported each group individually and then conducted a lively review session when the students' answers showed that they had secured a considerable amount of new learning during the preceding 50 minutes.

125. Leadership and management are very good. The teachers collaborate very well in genuine partnership. Those less experienced receive highly effective support from more experienced colleagues to enable them to prepare the students appropriately for assessment. Assessment not only provides the students with very good feedback on how to improve but also effectively monitors their progress. Students' attitudes are excellent. The enthusiasm and mutual support displayed by Year 13 students were outstanding. This highly positive approach was summed by one student who spoke of how refreshing it was to have teachers who had a passion for their subject and helped the students share that passion. The students' study of English is enriched by other activities such as visits from published authors, further reading and cultural trips. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

126. Students' standards of communication are consistently above average. Inspectors noted the students' confidence and effectiveness in speaking and listening. The assured use of complex technical terms when evaluating work in design and technology typified the work of students in most subjects. Research skills are also above average with students able to use a range of sources effectively, including electronic media. Standards of writing are above average with assignments and notes well organised. The standards of writing in English literature are well above average with the very highest attainers successfully producing complex analysis of difficult concepts with clarity and assurance.
127. The provision for the development of communication skills is good. Teachers are aware of the importance of encouraging the students to become effective independent learners. For example, Year 12 biology students researched in pairs key points about how the heart works and presented their finding to the rest of the group using an electronic method of presentation. In literature Year 12 students are already expected to lead the analysis of large extracts from difficult texts such as 'The Miller's Tale'. Expectations of this nature also reflect a challenging approach to reading and research skills. In history the students' independent learning is enhanced by a module that specifically seeks to enhance study skills. In physics there is an effective emphasis of encouraging the "funnelling down" of information into key concepts and information to secure learning. Teachers provide good support for writing. Students receive clear guidance on structuring their response and using information appropriately to support hypotheses and valuations.

MATHEMATICS

The department offers a combination of modules to students in Year 12 and 13, which can lead to qualifications ranging from a single AS Level through to two A Levels in mathematics and further mathematics. Further mathematics is taught jointly with a neighbouring school. The whole provision was the focus of this inspection.

Provision in mathematics is very **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 12 and well above average in Year 13.

- Students achieve well. For those of higher standards on entry achievement is very good, because teaching is consistently good or better.
- Students of lower standards on entry achieve less well than their peers.
- Students do not routinely use ICT in their work.

Commentary

128. Results in 2002 examinations were well above national averages and in 2003 they were similar. This continues a trend of consistently high standards. Data provided by the school demonstrates good achievement in both years.
129. Students have above average standards on entry to the course as very few students do not have top grades at GCSE. Standards in the present Year 13 are well above average. Standards at this early stage in Year 12 are above average. From observations of students' work and lessons, achievement is good. It is best for those with higher standards on entry. Females' achievement is in line with their more numerous male peers. Standards are comparable in modules of pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. For example, students can recall complex formulae and most can manipulate and use these to solve problems. They can use appropriate measures of distribution and spread. The department recruits well and retention rates on courses are consistently close to 100 percent.
130. Teaching and learning are very good overall and consistently effective. Teachers are knowledgeable mathematicians and experienced at this level. Work is very well structured and planned to address all aspects of the syllabus and to build students' knowledge, understanding and confidence. They are very well prepared for modular examinations. The teachers' high level of knowledge enables them to challenge and extend the thinking of gifted mathematicians who achieve very well. Relationships are very good and there is considerable mutual respect. Students are very committed, enjoy the subject and cope well with its demands. They feel very well supported and advised by their teachers and most are confident enough to ask for help. They value the accessibility of their teachers beyond the school day. Students of lower standards on entry find the pace demanding and make less good progress than their peers, though they are well supported by their teaching staff. Methodology is varied and ICT is used well to enhance learning. For example in a Year 12 lesson, the use of a graphical package to demonstrate the effect of changing coefficients in equations enabled the pupils to quickly understand and make use of this. However, students rarely use ICT for their own work. The high level of structure and examination preparation means students do not always develop as fully independent learners so that overall their achievement is good rather than very good.
131. As in the main school, leadership is excellent and management is very good. There is very strong teamwork to develop and improve strategies for teaching and learning. Excellent progress has been made since the last inspection in terms of the examination results gained and the way the department has developed.

Mathematics across the curriculum

132. Standards of numeracy in the sixth form are good. Students' mathematical skills are always adequate for their subjects of study and often better. For example, in physics and chemistry they can use formulae, spreadsheets and graphs very effectively. In psychology, students use statistical techniques with confidence. In other subjects such as history and leisure and recreation, students make little use of data analysis to enhance their work. Where numeracy skills are taught in subjects other than mathematics, they are taught well.

SCIENCE

A Level courses in biology, chemistry and physics were all inspected.

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students find lessons very stimulating; they are often totally absorbed in learning and achieve very well as a result.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge that underpins their clear explanations and probing questions to check students' understanding.
- The curriculum is presented in lively and topical contexts and teaching materials are often stimulating, although teachers are still researching how best to use them.
- ICT is used well to bring discussions to life and encourage students to research and communicate what they have learned.

Commentary

133. In 2002, GCE A Level results were well above those nationally; all 25 students passed and a good proportion gained higher grades A and B. The achievement of the students was very good. The 2003 A Level results show standards are being maintained; all students passed and two fifths achieved higher grades. Standards have been consistently well above average for several years. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the way ICT is now used to enhance teaching and learning.
134. Standards seen during the inspection in Year 13 are well above average and students are achieving very well; the majority are on course to achieve higher grades. They have a very good grasp of key facts and principles; for example, they confidently explain the probability of finding particular characteristics in first and second generation pea plants produced from different pure-bred parent plants and they use technical terms and notations precisely. Their very good achievements come about because teachers are very enthusiastic, knowledgeable and expect high standards; their explanations are very clear and interspersed with challenging questions that result in stimulating discussions, engrossing all students in learning. Discussions are also enhanced by effective use of ICT to illustrate and relate key ideas to real life contexts. The school's working farm also provides a valuable resource to enliven teaching and learning and the school makes good use of residential visits to a field study centre in Devon to enrich students' ecology studies.
135. The school is involved with an innovative national A Level pilot scheme that explores key biological principles through relevant and often topical contexts. An example is life-style and health, through which students in Year 12 are acquiring a very good grasp of the way the heart operates and problems that arise with it. One group explored electrocardiograms relating to a variety of heart conditions and explained the traces in terms of key steps in the pumping cycle. Another reflected on factors affecting heart rate and blood pressure and their implications for the way we live and a third presented their findings with illustrated slides. Students are finding such approaches totally absorbing and are responding very well. Teachers' enthusiasm when using the varied resources with students, including much that uses ICT imaginatively, is very evident. They are also reflecting on how best to use the course materials which sometimes lead to new and challenging teaching methods such as the use of the Internet to both set tasks for students and to give advice and guidance on draft responses. This is a key developmental area for the subject to make its provision even better.
136. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers enthuse and often inspire their students. They achieve a very good balance between well illustrated explanations and challenging questions and tasks to check students' understanding. Students are encouraged to discuss in pairs and give more considered responses to teachers' questions; for example when considering the design of experiments to investigate the efficacy of methods for reducing stress and heart-rate. They use ICT very well to bring discussions to life and also to encourage students to learn outside lessons. Students say how much they value the comments and guidance they receive when work is marked, especially assignments and coursework.
137. Leadership and management are very good; they inspire and unite staff in a strong commitment throughout to explore new methods and raise standards. Students' progress towards their target grades is closely monitored and their achievements reviewed.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students gain a very good grasp of chemistry principles as a result of stimulating activities and discussions, although some lower attaining students in Year 12 need more support when working at individual tasks.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and present new ideas very clearly so that students quickly assimilate and apply them.
- ICT is used very well to enliven class presentations and to explore patterns in data, though sensors and data-loggers are not used enough.

Commentary

138. In 2002, GCE A Level results were above those nationally; half of the ten students entered gained higher grades A or B and all passed. Achievement was good. Standards have been consistently above, or well above, those nationally for several years. In 2003, all students passed and two thirds of those entered gained higher grades. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, especially in the use of some aspects of ICT to enhance students' learning.
139. Standards seen in the current Year 13 are well above those nationally and students are achieving very well; the majority are on course to gain higher grades at GCE A Level. They show a very good grasp of fundamental principles and concepts; for example when using spreadsheets to calculate the quantities of magnesium required to remove sulphur from iron when converting it to steel and explaining the changes in temperature and composition that occur during conversion. Most students learn very well in lessons and make good progress because teachers engage them in lively discussions and challenge them to apply what they have learned. In one lesson, Year 13 students learning about the use of nuclear magnetic resonance techniques to deduce the structure of some organic molecules quickly grasped the basic principles as a result of a very effective and well illustrated explanation from their teacher. Consequently they were quickly able to use similar spectroscopic data to work out the likely structure of some other compounds for themselves.
140. Students in Year 12 settle in quickly to their studies and find the contexts for their learning stimulating and varied; for example, when exploring and predicting the shapes of organic molecules on the basis of their electronic structures and modelling these shapes with balloons. Most students grasped the principles well, although a few weaker students, slower and less secure in applying what they have learned, need closer monitoring and support from their teacher when working independently. Nevertheless, overall the students achieve well.
141. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very challenging and expectations high. This is achieved through very effective questioning interspersed with clear explanations of new concepts that take students' understanding further. ICT based presentations are used very well to enliven discussions and for research and presentation, although teachers are not yet using data-logging techniques in practical work with students as much as they could; this is a developing area for the subject. Students are engaged in stimulating investigations as part of their coursework; these and other assignments are closely monitored by teachers and much feedback and guidance is given to help students improve.
142. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader provides a very good role-model to other staff and works closely with them to coordinate provision and support for students. Students are closely monitored towards their target grades and their achievements analysed.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and students learn well; they are challenged in lessons by some demanding work.
- The students have a very positive attitude to their studies and there is a shared commitment to succeed between students and teachers.
- Too few female students enrol for the course.

Commentary

143. Over the last three years results have improved steadily and in 2002 were very high, being in the top five per cent nationally. Results for 2003 have maintained this high level of attainment. In relation to their prior attainment at GCSE, the 2002 results represent excellent achievement. At the time of the last inspection the work in the sixth form was above average and in physics this standard has continued to improve steadily but small numbers mean that there can be fluctuations in the results from one year to the next.
144. Standards on entry are variable but students commencing the AS course are at the national average. Overall, standards seen in lessons and in students' work were above average, but were higher in Year 13 than in Year 12, and they are achieving well. Male students outnumber female students by about four to one but all are treated equally and males and females achieve equally well. Students are able to handle data with confidence and can make full use of ICT to help with their analyses. They work co-operatively with each other and help and support one another in a variety of ways. Students were observed tackling some challenging work on power and efficiency and clearly relished the task and gained immense satisfaction from their success.
145. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have high expectations of their students and set some demanding tasks. Homework and project work links with that done in class and regular exercises are set for the reinforcement of the learning taking place in lessons. The teachers' interest and enthusiasm for the subject is transmitted to the students and lessons are clearly enjoyable learning experiences. This enthusiasm is shown in the annual visit to the CERN project at Geneva by the AS Level group.
146. Leadership and management are very good. The course is well organised and the two teachers who share the A and AS courses work closely together and there is an excellent working relationship between teachers and students. On-going assessment is very good and students are well aware of both their A and AS targets and their present performance level. The department makes effective use of the analysis of results each year. The teachers give students clear guidelines on the work to be done to attain their targets. Accommodation and resources are very good and students are well supported by appropriate textbooks and the availability of electronic resource material.
147. Since the time of the last report the school has maintained the very high standard of Advanced level work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are good in Year 12.
- Students enjoy ICT and they work hard.
- Lack of specialist software hampers learning in Year 13.
- Too few female students enrol for the course.

Commentary

148. Standards in Year 12 are above average. These students started the course with average GNVQ grades and their achievement is good. This is because of the good teaching they receive. Standards of work are below average in Year 13. Students started their A Level course with below average GNVQ grades, making their achievement satisfactory. Results in the 2002 A Level examination were well above average, with most students exceeding their predicted grades; they achieved well. The unvalidated results at A and AS Level show a dip in performance when compared to 2002, with a significant minority of students not attaining their predicted grades. As most candidates were boys, analysis based on gender is not possible.
149. Year 13 students are studying computer graphics and they can enlarge a drawing without loss of definition using vector software. A minority of students can explain the mathematics behind vector diagrams. Students can amend and enhance photographs using pixel editing programs but the range of skills that students can learn and practise are limited by the software they are using. Students have recently started to master animation software and they can competently draw simple moving objects. Students in Year 12 are constructing relational database with at least three tables. All can write queries to correctly access a range of information from their database. They can devise a form to abstract and print data and higher attaining students can enter formulas to calculate such figures as VAT. The forms are well designed and

present information clearly. Higher attaining students' forms are of a good commercial standard and include features such as company logos.

150. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in AS lessons. Students' learning is well focused by clear targets set at the start of each lesson. They enjoy and learn well in practical classes because they get good individual help and advice on how to improve their work. In the best lessons this advice really accelerates students' understanding through encouragement to experiment with a variety of solutions to solve the problems they meet. For example Year 12 students were encouraged to try different ways of displaying information on an invoice before choosing the best. Students in Year 12 also benefit because their work is challenging and teachers set demanding time limits for its completion. In a minority of lessons learning is hindered by teachers' limited experience with some software and students do not learn in enough depth.
151. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head of department is already having a positive impact on standards, particularly in Year 12. Assessment is well established and satisfactorily used to monitor students' progress. ICT was not taught in the sixth form when the last inspection took place, so no judgements can be made on improvement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

152. The use of ICT across subjects in the sixth form is satisfactory. The potential to use ICT to further enliven teaching and raise standards is hindered by the lack of an overall policy designed to promote use, but in some subjects good use is made. For example, Year 13 chemistry students use spreadsheets very well to gain understanding of impurities in iron. Year 12 mathematics students use Omnigraph to reinforce their understanding of quadratics and travel and tourism students use the Internet to research holiday destinations, check air flight timetables and find room charges for hotels.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history and psychology. Two lessons were sampled in religious education. Standards at Advanced level were well above average in 2002. There is a continuing upward trend in the last three years. Teaching is very good and enables students to develop independence in their learning and research. Furthermore, their skills of analysis and evaluation are very well developed. Students learn very well and their achievement is very good.

Geography

The provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' knowledge and understanding are enhanced through residential study at home and abroad.
 - Students achieve well because of the careful guidance they receive from teachers.
 - Learning is enriched through the use of ICT for research and presentation.
 - More thought needs to be given to raising the achievement of male students.
153. Results in the 2002 GCE examination were average, with female candidates doing much better than their male counterparts. The results are similar to those of recent years. Given the students' prior levels of attainment, achievement was satisfactory.
154. For present students standards are higher. Year 13 students know about a wide range of topics from the physical and urban environments to issues of world development. Year 12 students are able to apply theoretical knowledge of the town development to studies of Chippenham, whilst in Year 13 students understand the importance of maintaining balance in the eco-system of sensitive environments such as the tropical rain forests in Brazil. Weaknesses are evident when students do not make enough use of case study information and explain answers in sufficient detail. Most students achieve very well and improve their skills as independent learners through research, the use of ICT and in class discussion, except where the negative attitude of the minority leads to more modest achievement.
155. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and this makes a significant contribution to the good achievement that most students make. Lessons are

well prepared and supported through the use of a range of resources that provide a clear focus for study, so that students improve their knowledge and understanding by research and discussion. The aims of lessons are clear and learning progresses briskly so that much is achieved. In a Year 13 lesson about birth and death rates learning was rapid because the teacher set challenging tasks for students to research and report findings. They concentrated well, organised information and gave presentations about their findings. Learning is enhanced through opportunities to participate in residential fieldwork in South Wales or France, thereby enabling students to incorporate first hand experience to their studies. Occasionally, where learning is less effective, students are not engaged enough orally and poor attitudes of the minority are not well managed so that insufficient progress is made.

156. The subject is well led and teachers are appropriately deployed to teach the various components of the AS and A Level courses. Clear systems are in place to track and review the progress that students make, so they are kept well informed about their achievements. The development plan, however, gives insufficient attention to sixth form development, particularly the planning to raise the achievement of male students. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan well and this enables students to achieve well, though in a minority of lessons learning is too teacher-centred.
- Individual studies are detailed and thoroughly researched.
- Students make limited use of statistical information to support their understanding of historical events.

Commentary

157. In 2002 results in the A level were above average. All students gained at least their target grade; achievement was at least satisfactory. Results have risen steadily since the last inspection. All students who followed the AS course last year have chosen to continue to A level. The number of students choosing to continue studying history into the sixth form is rising.
158. For present Year 13, standards are above average. This represents good achievement. It was too early in the AS level course to judge standards in Year 12, though all have made a good start. Students have a good overview of the periods they study and can compare the views of the people of the time. They respond to written questions clearly, evaluating different evidence and make judgements that they support with reason. Students research, scan and select information and can present it fluently in written and oral form. They seldom present information in diagrammatic form and there is little evidence of the use of data to support understanding of events. Individual research projects are detailed and well presented. Response to their chosen question is logical and supported by relevant evidence. Higher attaining students identify clearly the requirements of essay titles and use their knowledge selectively in response. Lower attainers include much relevant detail, but do not always relate it to the question concerned.
159. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers possess good subject knowledge that enables them to direct lessons purposefully and provide clear explanations. Students are well supported in their individual study and thoroughly prepared for their examinations. Teachers encourage students to discuss their work together, prompted by effective questioning. When lessons are clearly defined and interesting resources and activities are used, students become active and learn quickly. Teaching is less effective when the teacher leads students through the work, providing them with ideas and interpretations. Students then take a more passive role. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, and they are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Teachers enable students to develop their study skills, although they use a limited variety of methods of displaying information. Marking is thorough and provides clear advice about how to improve their work.
160. The quality of leadership and management is good. The AS level has been successfully introduced. Examination results are reviewed in order to monitor progress and to identify areas for development. The quality of teaching, standards and achievement have improved. Since the last report progress has been good.

Psychology

Provision for psychology is **good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average. Students achieve well in sustaining high standards.
- Lively teaching motivates students well, but they are not always sufficiently challenged to work in depth.
- Leadership is keen and enthusiastic, but the arrangements for the management of the subject within the science faculty, while supportive, do not focus specifically enough on psychology.
- The subject is very popular. Numbers have increased rapidly since its introduction in 2002.

Commentary

161. Students were entered for the AS Level examination for the first time in 2003. No national comparisons are possible, but school data shows that the students achieved well in relation to their GCSE results. Standards seen during the inspection were above average. Students have good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of relevant psychological research, which they are able to compare and evaluate. Year 13 students did this confidently in presenting their own research into the effect of environmental stressors on aggressions. They develop a good understanding of methodological issues from an early stage as shown by Year 12 students in their work on psychological abnormality. They develop very good independent research skills and are keen to carry out their own in-depth research. Achievement is good.
162. Written work develops well. Year 12 essays show a good capacity to select and structure appropriate evidence. Research projects begun by Year 13 students in Year 12, at best, set out clear aims and hypotheses, and reflect sound understanding of the design and reliability of published research. Argument is often fluent and well supported by reference to relevant case studies. Some projects, however, are weaker in these respects with points not always being sufficiently well developed and substantiated with evidence from psychological studies. There are also weaknesses in the identification of the limitations of students' own research, and of ways in which this could be strengthened. While statistical evidence is carefully analysed, findings are not always used well enough to support argument. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are good.
163. Overall teaching and learning are good. Strengths include detailed planning, a good emphasis on psychological theories, models, processes and skills, effective individual and group guidance and the strong encouragement of individual research and intellectual effort. Questioning is often used well to challenge students to develop their points and generate whole class discussion, but sometimes this is not the case and opportunities are missed to deepen students' understanding through in-depth exploration of issues. Where teaching and learning are weaker this sometimes reflects some insecurity in subject expertise. This is being rapidly addressed. Students are very well motivated. They enjoy psychology and are keen to succeed. They respond very well to the lively teaching, sharing their teachers' enthusiasm. Classroom relationships are very good and powerfully support learning. Students are thoroughly involved throughout though there are some lessons where they are working compliantly, completing tasks set for them rather than being challenged to take initiative in exploring issues in greater depth for themselves.
164. The rapid growth of the subject since its introduction in partnership with a neighbouring school has resulted in shared teaching being no longer necessary in Year 12. The subject is flourishing. This, together with students' good achievement, largely results from the lively and good and enthusiastic leadership of the teacher in charge working in close partnership with another equally enthusiastic teacher who started teaching psychology in September 2003. Psychology is well supported as part of the science faculty but the rapid growth in numbers means that management arrangements, including systematic monitoring and evaluation, need to be more subject specific.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus subject was design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good in Year 13 and inspires and challenges the students to produce standards of work that are well above average.
- The very good use of ICT in students' project work improves the standard of presentation.
- The pace at which some students in Year 12 work is too slow.

Commentary

165. Standards have improved at A Level over the past three years and are now well above average. In 2002, half the A level candidates attained grades A and B and all passed. Attainment of boys was better than that of girls. Similarly, in the AS examinations, half of the candidates attained grades A and B and all passed. Achievement in Year 12 was good and was very good in Year 13. Present students are keen and enthusiastic and high standards of work were seen during the inspection, especially in Year 13. Some Year 12 students are still lacking in confidence as the course is still new and they are still adjusting to the demands of higher-level work. Overall standards are at least above average and achievement is good. For Year 13 students, standards are above average and they achieve very well.
166. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teachers have a thorough understanding of the subject knowledge and detailed knowledge of the requirements of the examination board. They use tracking sheets to keep students on task, though some students in Year 12 need to be closely monitored to work at a faster pace. Students are provided with accurate and thorough oral and written feedback. They are aware of their predicted grades and the high expectations that teachers have of them. Students' own evaluations of their work show an appropriate degree of self-criticism and reflect how pleased they are with their achievements. Although arrangements for case study work are time consuming, they provide the students with real life situations that motivate them on to the advanced level components of the course. Students make good use of ICT where appropriate, for design and manufacture and improving the presentation of their work. They use technical language fluently. Students are able to work independently and make good use of resources for learning.
167. Leadership and management are very good; the head of faculty sets high standards for teaching and learning. The quality of planning and guidance documents is very good. An expectation of high standards in teaching, work ethic and high attainment are communicated to both staff and students. Since the previous inspection, the number of students studying A Level design has increased and students' attainment is well above the national average. The use of ICT for presentation of students' work has improved dramatically. Students now have a clear understanding of the design process and demonstrate this throughout their projects. The level of improvement has been good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The emphasis was on art and design but two lessons in music and one in drama were sampled. In music, courses are provided in partnership with a neighbouring school with whom the teaching is also shared. The quality of teaching, learning and achievement seen in lessons was very good. In drama, standards are well above average, based on very good teaching and learning, and students achieve very well.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Students benefit greatly from teachers' effective one-to-one individual help and advice in lessons and this helps their learning.
- Year 12 have made a good start on their AS level course.
- Some Year 13 students are over-reliant on staff to motivate and stretch them.
- The lack of ICT in the department seriously disadvantages students' experience.

Commentary

168. Too few students, particularly boys, have taken the subject in recent years to appear on national data. Comparisons, therefore, are not statistically valid. In 2002, students taking AS level did well, many achieving higher grades than expected. A2 level students' grades, while above average overall, were as expected for individuals. In 2003, both sets of results showed an average range, with students achieving the grades predicted.
169. Attainment also varies between the current year groups in the sixth form. Both groups are small. The range of their attainment is average and achievement is satisfactory. Year 12 students, all girls, have made a very successful start to their AS level course and are already working at levels beyond their predicted grades. This was evident in classes with both teachers, where students were developing very good experiments with surface texture on paper in one lesson and high quality poly-prints based on structures from still-life work in another.
170. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but are very effective in Year 12. The small size of both of groups creates very good opportunities for teachers to spend valuable lengths of time in one-to-one "mini-tutorials" in lessons. These individual interactions, combined with very good marking of their work, give students detailed evaluation about the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Ways to improve it are successfully negotiated between staff and students, making them good independent workers. This is more successful with Year 12, whose responses send them off in individually exploratory directions. Some of Year 13 need much more pressure from teachers to respond in this creative manner and are much less creatively independent.
171. Despite bids for ICT in the department, the absence of computers, scanners and other peripherals seriously detracts from students' opportunities to explore their creative potential. This is particularly detrimental for those who wish to go into art-related higher education courses or careers. Resources overall are satisfactory, but most students' work is two-dimensional, largely because of their experience lower down the school.
172. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department is aware of shortcomings, for example in ICT and makes good analysis of available data. The relative isolation of the department is unhelpful in forging links, which would further improve provision, for example through the sharing of excellent resources available in the design and technology department. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on AVCE leisure and recreation. However, one lesson in AVCE travel and tourism was observed. Teaching and learning were good and standards were above average, helped by the opportunities the students had to work independently. Two lessons were sampled in physical education. Results in AS and A2 level dance are in line with national averages. AS level physical education is being taught for the first time this year. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Teaching is good overall. Leadership and management of sixth form examination work are good. However, there is no enrichment programme for sixth form students, which has a negative effect on participation in sport.

Leisure and recreation

Provision in leisure and recreation is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and some have recent and relevant first hand commercial experience.
- Attitudes to learning are very positive and teaching is good. As a result, students achieve well, especially in the practical aspects of the course.
- Partnerships with leisure and recreation facilities are underdeveloped. More effective partnerships would promote stronger vocational learning.
- For standards to improve further teaching should focus on developing literacy and ICT skills.

Commentary

173. Results in the AVCE course in 2002 were well above average. In view of the students' prior attainment, this outcome showed they achieved very well. Present standards overall are above average. Students are confident learners who show an understanding of the main concepts and skills and understand the evidence requirements of both internally and externally assessed units. Achievement is good and the difference between past standards and those seen during the inspection can be accounted for by experience. Some students, especially those in Year 12, are new to the course and its requirements are gradually finding their feet.
174. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are very well planned and learning activities closely linked to the assessment requirements of each of the AVCE units. This contributes to effective learning and a good level of achievement. Teachers use a variety of learning activities and draw on their own extensive theoretical and contextual knowledge in their teaching, though in some units, teachers do not draw sufficiently on real vocational contexts, partly because partnerships with local firms are in an embryonic stage. They know about essential safety procedures in practical activities and ensure that practical work is underpinned by a sound basis of theory. There is a strong sense of students' involvement in their own learning. Pace is brisk and students are appropriately challenged. Teachers enable students to adopt a critical approach in their work and this gives the students the confidence to develop the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. This is sometimes achieved through encouraging peer assessment, which represents very good practice that could be shared. Weak literacy and ICT skills by some students have a depressing effect on standards. However, because they are very well motivated and well taught, students, including those with low levels of initial prior attainment, achieve very well by the end of the course. Students do particularly well in the more practical aspects of the course.
175. Leadership and management of leisure and recreation has recently passed to the curriculum leader for business studies who faces the challenge of coordinating a disparate, multi-disciplinary team, but nonetheless, a team that is highly committed and hard working. A satisfactory start has been made. Staff are effectively deployed and students on the course are gaining a coherent learning experience. This subject was not covered on the previous inspection so no judgement on improvement can be made.

BUSINESS

Business studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide challenging work.
- Attitudes to learning are very positive and teaching is good. As a result, students achieve well.
- There remain significant opportunities to develop further the use of ICT to promote learning.
- Students' practical insight is limited because partnerships with business are underdeveloped.

Commentary

176. Results at A and AS level in 2002 were well above average and there is an excellent course retention rate. Value-added analysis shows that in relation to their prior attainment, students achieve well. For present students, especially in Year 13, standards are well above average. They are not yet as high in Year 12, partly because some students have not studied business studies at GCSE. However, as their confidence grows, their achievement will improve. Year 13 students are confident learners and understand the specialist terminology of the subject and the main concepts. Many can apply their knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts. They use literacy and numeracy skills effectively in their work but the standard of ICT skills used by students, particularly to support coursework research and financial modelling, though satisfactory overall, is variable. Students in both years achieve well in their lessons and those in Year 13 produce very high standard of coursework that is well above expectations based on their prior attainment. They are achieving very well.
177. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but it is very good in Year 13, where staff have more confidence in the students to work independently. There is a tendency in Year 12 for learning to be too teacher-centred and this slows progress. Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are very clear.

Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to good effect in their teaching. This helps to boost the students' confidence. Teachers use pre-published case studies well but opportunities for drawing on real business contexts to promote learning are sometimes missed. The department needs to foster some good quality business partnerships as a means of further enlivening the quality of learning. ICT is used effectively as a tool for presenting work but there are insufficient opportunities provided for students to use ICT for research and the analysis of data and modelling in their work in finance and accounts.

178. The curriculum leader of business studies leads and manages the department very well; he provides very clear vision and direction. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards are much higher and the quality of teaching is improved, although there is still scope to develop the use of ICT to promote learning in the subject and to develop partnerships with the business community.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No courses were inspected.

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		2
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	3	3
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	3	3
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	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	2	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1	1
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	3	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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