

INSPECTION REPORT

MELLOW LANE SCHOOL

Hayes, Middlesex

LEA area: Hillingdon

Unique reference number: 102447

Headteacher: Mr R Stafford

Lead inspector: Roderick Passant

Dates of inspection: 9 – 13 February 2004

Inspection number: 259161

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1327
School address:	Hewens Road Hayes Middlesex
Postcode:	UB4 8JP
Telephone number:	020 8765 3007
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Philip Scammell
Date of previous inspection:	16 March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a popular 11 to 19 mixed comprehensive serving the Hayes area of Hillingdon. The school is bigger than other secondary schools. There are 1327 students on roll with 220 in the sixth form. The roll is weighted towards boys (roughly 3:2). The sixth form is larger than most other sixth forms. The school is a significant partner in the Hillingdon Excellence in the Cities cluster of schools. This national initiative is bringing additional funding to partner schools to tackle, co-operatively, key issues relating to aspects of inclusion and staff recruitment.

The school is very diverse ethnically but the two largest groups are White British, and Asian British – Indian. There are 12 refugees and asylum seekers. The percentage of students' first language not believed to be English is high. The percentage of students with special educational needs is above the national average, as is the percentage of students with statements. The school has three specialist provisions catering for specific special educational needs. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. This figure is probably lower than one that reflects the economic difficulties facing many parents. The numbers joining or leaving the school at times other than the start of the academic year is just above the national average, although, significantly, the highest proportion of those joining the school do so towards the end of their education. Attainment on entry covers the full range of ability but, overall, it is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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31218	Tom Allen	Team inspector	Geography Geography (sixth form)
30911	John Barton	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
8216	Geoffrey Binks	Team inspector	Special educational needs
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32334	Martyn Groucutt	Team inspector	Post-16 support
14490	Susan Jackson	Team inspector	History History (sixth form)
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31983	Debra Makin	Team inspector	Physical education Sports science (sixth form)
20913	Nicholas McKemey	Team inspector	Art and design Art and design (sixth form)
5241	Cyndi Millband	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form) Chemistry (sixth form) Physics (sixth form-sampling)
28097	Sheila Nolan	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)
18032	Isobel Randall	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Information and communication technology (sixth form)
18950	Carmen Rodney	Team inspector	English
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Mellow lane is a good school with very good features. Students¹ achieve well, overall, and attain appropriate standards. This is because teaching is good. The school's commitment to being an inclusive school, which provides for all students, is reflected in a carefully designed curriculum that meets their needs and allows them to succeed. Although the school is large, individuals matter and they lie at the heart of what the school is about. The attitudes and the behaviour of the vast majority of students are good. The school provides very good care and support for all students. There are good relationships between staff and students and generally between students. The school is a strong friendly community. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school has serious accommodation problems. Parts of the accommodation are very poor and not good enough for all who work and learn there
- The school is very well led by the headteacher, and leadership across the school is strong. There is good teamwork
- The provision for all students with additional needs is very good
- There is high quality care and support and all staff work very hard on behalf of students
- Difficulties with staffing and casual absence, particularly in Year 11, are a major cause of disruption to learning
- Many students find the formal language needs of examinations difficult
- Students are over-dependant on their teachers. Many find working on their own difficult

There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and the curriculum enriched by wide-ranging courses. The school has used the increased flexibility that it has been given to develop vocational courses very well. There has been investment in new school buildings.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

Standards of work in class are better than examination results. **Students achieve well, overall,** with better progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language also make good progress because of the quality of support they receive. White UK students do not do as well as other ethnic heritage groups. Students have below average speaking and listening and literacy skills. Writing at length and using the formal language that they need to for examinations are particular difficulties for many students. They are competent in information communication technology (ICT) and numeracy. The overall provision in English, mathematics and science is good. The school provides, very successfully, alternative pathways through the 14 to 19 age range, allowing students to develop confidence and skills and to take combinations of academic and vocational courses.

Standards of behaviour and the attitudes of most of the students are good. **The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is sound.** There are very effective alternative

¹ Ofsted reports usually use the term 'pupils' to describe those attending for the compulsory period of education and 'students' to describe those attending the post-16 provision. The school's preferred term is to use 'students' to describe all those at the school and therefore this term is used throughout in the text of the report, although headings still use the term 'pupils'.

strategies to support those few students who display aggressive attitudes and behaviour. Overall, members of staff manage behaviour well. Overall, attendance is in line with national averages. There is casual, often unauthorised, absence particularly in Year 11 and Year 12, which is disrupting learning for some students. The school procedures for attendance are very good. There is very effective home school liaison and partnership with the educational welfare officer.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Students' learning is good because of good teaching. **Teaching is good across the school.** The school has serious difficulties in recruiting staff. The quality and range of the curriculum, particularly for Years 10 and 11, has many very good aspects. The curriculum development is driven by the needs of students. The school is not meeting its statutory requirements for religious education. The school cares for students very well and this supports their good achievement. The school provides very good individual and group support for students with a wide range of needs and disabilities. There are particular strengths in helping students with specific learning disabilities, those with very low basic skills on entry and students who need help to manage their behaviour and anger. The school works hard to maintain its effective partnership with parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team are very good. Leadership across the school is good. There are good features to the governance of the school. Overall, governance is sound. Governors are very committed to the school and provide effective support and, when appropriate, challenge. There is strong corporate teamwork across the school. Management is very good at senior level and good across the school. There is very good evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses at senior level and strong accountability through performance management. The school is committed to professional development of all its staff in order to develop their skills. Recruitment of staff remains a difficulty and hampers development.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school has a good reputation and is oversubscribed. Students in the sixth form, in informal discussion, are good ambassadors when asked to reflect on their experience when they were in the main school. They acknowledge the support and help provided by the staff.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Most of the following points have been identified by the school and figure in the school's improvement plan.

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

- improve the standard of accommodation for the main school and for the post-16 provision
- continue to address the issues that cause disruption to students' learning; these include: staff recruitment, students' absence, and the poor behaviour of a minority of students
- ensure that students are very clear what it is that they have learned and what it is that they have to do in order to move to the next level or grade by regular reinforcement of their targets and sharing grade criteria; encourage and structure the development of independent learning skills for all students, including those studying in the post-16 provision
- ensure that appropriate emphasis is given to developing all students' speaking skills and access to formal English - the language of examinations - allowing them to rehearse and share their ideas before writing; many students find the generation of ideas for extended writing difficult
- seek ways to support, extend and involve students in additional learning opportunities

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that sufficient time is allocated to religious education so that it is possible to meet the requirements of the Hillingdon Agreed syllabus and that students experience religious education in the sixth form

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is both effective and cost effective. Students attained results that were below the national average in 2003 but their achievement was good in relation to their standards on entry. The school offers a range of 14 courses leading to AS level and A2 level, three vocational courses and two GCSE courses. It provides a positive environment for the personal and social development of students. Teaching in the sixth form is good. There is inadequate and poor accommodation for the sixth form.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- good teaching that is characterised by good subject expertise
- students have positive attitudes to the sixth form and show growing maturity in their approach to school life, although many students demonstrate weaknesses in the quality of their independent study skills
- very good external links, especially with universities, help students to develop a very good awareness of post-16 opportunities
- the school aims to meet the different needs of students by offering a very broad range of academic and vocational courses
- the school works hard to build a culture of high aspirations and supports and extends the very successful range of pathways to higher education via vocational and academic courses, often in combination
- the sixth form is a well-integrated and harmonious community, in which individuals are valued

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

There has been good improvement in the post-16 provision since the last inspection.

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. Some, not listed here, were sampled.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English: Good . Students achieve well and standards are improving because of good teaching.
Mathematics	Mathematics: Satisfactory . Standards at A2 level ² are satisfactory for those completing the course. However, a significant number of students underachieve in AS mathematics courses and there is a high drop out rate following AS course results. In the sample of lessons seen teaching was good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of mathematics and the requirements of the course.
Science	Biology: Satisfactory . Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. Standards are broadly in line with the national average. Achievement is good in Year 13 and satisfactory in Year 12. One teacher copes very well with the teaching and responsibility of all the advanced level work. Chemistry: Good . Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Standards are above average in Year 13 and achievement is very good. In Year 12, standards are variable; practical skills are unsophisticated. Physics: Good . Teachers' very good teamwork and methodical planning leads to good quality learning. Achievement of the small number of students in Year 13 is very good. In Year 12, progress is sound.
Information and communication technology	Information Technology: Very good . Teaching is good, with very good relationships and assessment that allow students to achieve well. The curriculum is very well suited to the needs of the students, and so retention into Year 13 is very good. Intermediate GNVQ Information technology: (sampled only). The course provides a valuable qualification. Teaching is satisfactory, but unsatisfactory

² Advanced level examinations are in two parts. AS and A2. The term A level is used in the report to describe advanced level work

	attendance and punctuality interfere with the continuity of learning.
Humanities	<p>History: Good. Students have performed well at A level in relation to their attainment on entry to the course. Teaching is good and there is very good leadership of the subject.</p> <p>Geography: Satisfactory. The good subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers help the students to achieve satisfactorily. They receive good guidance and support both in and out of lesson time.</p> <p>The following subjects were sampled:</p> <p>Law: students make good gains in understanding and achieve well.</p> <p>Economics: students displayed well-informed, thoughtful responses to teacher questioning and made good progress.</p> <p>Psychology: students are very organised and the teacher's very good subject knowledge develops students who are very motivated.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Art: Good. The AS and A2 course structure and very good teaching enables almost all students to attain C or B grades. ICT provision is poor.</p> <p>Performance Studies: Very Good. Teachers use their extensive specialist knowledge well to motivate and enthuse students, notwithstanding very poor facilities.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical Education: Satisfactory . Teachers work hard to raise understanding within the examination subject, often working with good effect with students who have limited physical education backgrounds.
Business	Business Studies: Good . The subject was sampled in depth. Teaching and learning are good. Students are highly committed and work hard to achieve good results. The course is well structured and levels of individual support enable individual students to be fully stretched. Students showed a very good understanding of the work they were undertaking for their coursework assignments and were able to talk in an informed and detailed way. Of particular note is the fact that there is no divide between the vocational and the academic – all Year 13 students spoken to were hoping to go on to university courses.
Health and social care	<p>The school does not offer a course in Health and social care.</p> <p>Modern Apprenticeship, Early Years and Education: The school provides the theoretical aspect of this course in one day each week. Students learn very well because of very good teaching.</p>

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

Sixth form managers provide a good quality of pastoral support and guidance in Years 12 and 13. Information about sixth form courses is good. The quality of advice offered in preparation for university entry is good; and this is enhanced by very effective links with universities and institutions of higher education. Students are well informed about careers opportunities. There are regular reporting and review procedures.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the sixth form could not be properly assessed owing to the long-term sickness of the head of sixth. A team of sixth form managers is accessible and supportive. Day-to-day administration is effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Discussion between inspectors and a significant number of sixth form students, both formally and informally during the inspection, indicates that students are positive about the sixth form, the quality

of teaching and the level of all-round support they receive. The strengths they have identified are justified.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, students achieve well. Standards seen in class and course work by Year 11 and in the post-16 provision are generally in line with national or course expectations.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9, making better than average progress, and attained standards in 2003 in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests that were in line with national averages
- Students make at least the progress you would expect from Year 9 to Year 11 and because the school makes extensive use of a non-GCSE accredited course, which depresses the overall points score, progress is even better than the statistics suggest
- Students achieve well in the sixth form and 70 per cent go on to higher education
- A very strong feature of the school is the provision of a range of pathways, with good progression for students aged 14 to 19, allowing vocational and academic courses to be taken, often in combination
- Standards are supported by: the care given to individuals; the good relationships between staff and students; teaching styles and approaches suggested by the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9; the use of teacher assistants; the relevance of the curriculum and, in some subjects, the good use of assessment, which engages students in their learning
- Standards are hampered by: the quality of the accommodation, factors that interrupt learning, particularly the difficulties the school has with recruitment, and the frequent absence of some students; the fact that students lack independent learning skills and find the formal language required in examination difficult

Commentary

1. Attainment on entry to the school is across the whole ability range of students but, overall, is below average. When students enter the school, literacy skills are below average, with a significant number having low reading ages. Students make above average progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. This is because the school has implemented specific strategies to improve performance in these years by following the National Strategy³ and using additional material to boost performance. The trend for improvement is above the national trend. In 2003, students attained overall standards in the Year 9 tests that were broadly in line with the national average. Targets were met in English, and exceeded in mathematics and science. When the results are compared with similar schools, schools where students had similar overall scores in their Year 6 tests in primary school, students attained above average. Against prior attainment standards are average in English, well above average in mathematics and above average in science. Overall, students achieve well.
2. The school has improved the boys' performance by focusing on their writing skills. Overall, although girls outperform boys in the school, when their performance is compared with the performance of girls nationally, girls are underachieving more than the boys are. The local education authority analysis notes that students at English as an additional language stage 2 and 3 perform above those at similar stages across the local education authority. Students joining the school late perform below those who start in Year 7 but above late entries in the local education authority.

³ The National Strategy - often referred to as the Key Stage 3 Strategy (Years 7 to 9) - aims to raise standards by strengthening teaching and learning, developing cross-curricular skills such as literacy and numeracy and helping students who come into Year 7 below level 4 to make faster progress. The strategy is based on four key principles: raising expectations, improving progression from primary school, promoting teaching and learning styles that engage and motivate students and demand their active participation and providing professional development and support for teachers.

3. There are different ways of analysing the test results. One way is to compare the percentages attaining a specific level. The other - perhaps fairer method, because it takes into account the performance of all students rather than simply those students who attained a specific threshold - is to use average point scores. This is determined by giving a numerical equivalent to each level or grade and dividing it by the number in the cohort who took the test or examination. The following table gives the average point score (APS) for the Year 9 tests. Although numerically the score may look below the national figure, the school's score falls into the average band for each subject.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.5 (32.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	35.4 (33.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.1 (31.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 222 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. The trend in the school's APS at GCSE is below the national trend. Standards are below the national average. Boys do slightly better than girls, overall, in that they attain an APS closer to the boys' national average than girls do in respect to the girls' national average. Standards are average compared with similar schools and the value-added data indicates that students are at least making the progress expected. Students are supported by the good provision in English, mathematics and science.
5. The school makes extensive and effective use of non-GCSE courses, particularly the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). The effect of this is to reduce the overall points score and therefore depress the APS. The increased use of ASDAN goes some way to explain a declining trend in GCSE average points score. It also suggests that the value added might well be higher than indicated. A further contributory factor is that the school's gender profile is skewed, in that boys significantly outnumber girls. Nationally, boys attain 47.5 per cent A* to C grades and girls ten per cent higher. Whilst it is not presented as an excuse, nevertheless, it is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when viewing the school's results over time.
6. Most students who learn English as an additional language achieve as well as native speakers of English and in many cases better, because they have achieved a higher level of academic and English language proficiency. Those students at the early stages of learning English make good progress in relation to their prior learning and achieve well because of the quality of support they receive. Those in the intermediate stages, who do not get this additional support, make slower progress, as they do not always understand the subject-related vocabulary and questions. At GCSE, Indian students attain above average results. Pakistani students attain around the school's average, as do other Asian students. White British attain below the school's and the local education authority's average. The number of Black Caribbean students is too small to make any fair judgement.
7. Taking ethnicity and gender together, the issue facing the school is to raise the achievement of White UK boys and girls. Whilst the following characteristics are somewhat sweeping generalisations, White UK students' underachievement is linked more often to particularly low self-esteem, which leads to more challenging behaviour and less positive attitudes. They tend to have poor speaking skills, which are reflected in writing that does not distinguish informal slang from a more formal tone. They also seem to be quick to take up a 'stance' - they take immediate likes and dislikes - and tend to need more instant gratification than other students.

8. The achievement of students with defined special educational needs is good throughout the school. It is particularly good for students who receive specialist teaching individually and in small groups when withdrawn from lessons. In some subjects, such as geography, history, and science, the support of teaching assistants is very helpful in ensuring that good progress is made by special educational needs students. In all subjects of the curriculum the achievement of students with special educational needs is at least as good as that of all other students. The small number of gifted and talented students achieve well.
9. The school's target-setting process is rigorous and based on wide-ranging data related to student's prior attainment. The school just missed its 2003 target of 43 per cent of students gaining 5 A* to C grades. It actually obtained 42 per cent. This is because results in English Literature were inexplicably disappointing in 2003 and the move to separate sciences meant that combined science results dipped. If these two departments had been on target there would have been an overall rise of two to three per cent in 5 A* to C grades.
10. The target for 2004 of 47 per cent to attain 5 A* to C grades is realistic but challenging. A key feature of the school is the fact that individual pupil targets are set and students' progress is tracked and monitored regularly and carefully to pick up particular problems.

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	42 (42)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	84 (82)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (93)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	30 (30.6)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 205 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

11. There are several factors other than good teaching that are helping to raise, and some to hamper, standards of attainment and student achievement in the school. These factors are explored in more detail throughout the commentary of the report.
Positive factors include:
 - A manifest commitment to individuals and provision of support for them that stems from the senior leadership of the school. There have been raised expectations of what students are capable of achieving, reflected in the improved standards in Year 9. The good quality of tracking of students' personal and academic achievement, particularly at senior level, allowing problems to be identified early
 - The impact of the National Strategy in Years 7 to 9, which has led to improvement in English, mathematics, science and in other subjects to a greater or lesser degree
 - The use of teacher assistants, particularly those attached to departments. In some subject areas they are used particularly effectively and are making a significant contribution to learning
 - The good relationships that staff have with their students. The quality of relationships is a very important factor in these students' learning - they learn because of their teacher and when continuity is built up over time and is regularly reinforced
 - The school's efforts to make the curriculum more relevant to individuals. Withdrawal from lessons for specialist teaching works because of high quality of the teaching that they receive
 - There are good examples within some departments of how assessment is being used very effectively to:
 - develop students' independence,
 - ensure clarity about lesson objectives so that students are aware of how a particular lesson fits into the overall 'map' of what they are learning,

- and the subject specifics of what they need to do in order to improve.
- Overall, there is good behaviour management. Overall behaviour is good (particularly in classrooms - most lessons are conducted in a calm atmosphere). There are challenging individuals but there is good and effective support by senior management team
- Good leadership at middle management, which has brought about effective change at departmental level
- There is good induction and professional training of teachers
- The steps the school has taken to extend the learning opportunities, such as homework clubs

There are also factors that impede students' progress:

- Poor accommodation, which depresses students' low self-esteem even further
- Discontinuities in learning caused by:
 - Difficulties in staff recruitment, which results in use of supply staff. Staffing difficulties cause disruption not only to students but are also a drain on middle and senior managers – there is less energy for strategic forward thinking and evaluation - in that energy is absorbed in managing the day-to-day, such as preparing lessons for other staff. Students respond best to teachers who know them and in whom students have built trust. Recruitment issues fracture that trust.
 - Poor attendance of a significant number of students in Year 11 and Year 12
 - The current organisation of the day is draining for staff and students.
 - The two-week timetable throws up irregular patterns of lessons.
- Students lack independent learning skills
- A major handicap to students' progress is their low literacy and speaking skills. Students find using and understanding the language of examinations - formal Standard English - difficult. They tend to use colloquial English with a narrow range of vocabulary and they also find it difficult to generate their ideas for extended written work

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	77.4 (87.2)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	17.2 (19.8)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	165.1 (186.5)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 105 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

12. The school is rightly concerned that students joining courses should have a good chance of success and stay for the duration of the course and has therefore introduced entry requirements for specific courses. That said, overall standards of entry into the sixth form are well below average. Students achieve well.
13. In lessons observed, and in the samples of work scrutinized, overall achievement was good. Students' work showed a good response to teaching. In roughly three-quarters of the lessons seen students made good and sometimes very good gains in learning.
14. There are 5 students with special educational needs in the sixth form, including 3 with statements. In addition, 49 per cent of students do not have English as a first language. Overall, these students make the same rate of progress as their peers.
15. Students' standards in literacy and communication skills are below national expectations. That said, they are mature and confident and want to share their work with visitors. The significant gains in self-esteem are obvious. A Year 13 group working on their drama group showed that they had developed the skills to work as a group and refine and hone their ideas.

Standards in numeracy and ICT are in line with national expectations. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the independent use of ICT is good. Sixth form students make effective use of the Internet for research and independent learning.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Overall, students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their rate of attendance are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students demonstrate good attitudes to their work
- Relationships are good among students and with teachers
- Behaviour of a minority of students disrupts a few lessons
- The irregular attendance of some students affects their learning
- Students are stoical in the face of their often very poor environment
- Students have a respect for the beliefs of others and a clear understanding of them. The school works hard to develop students' sense of self-esteem

Commentary

16. Students' attitudes to their work in lessons are usually good or very good. They respond well to interesting teaching and readily emulate teachers who display enthusiasm for a topic. Students co-operate effectively and appreciate opportunities for discussion; they would welcome more. Their good attitudes to learning are seen throughout the school, including in lessons in Year 7 to 9, work towards GCSE or A level examinations, and the varied range of vocational and other curriculum activities that are offered on and off the school site, such as ASDAN.
17. Relationships are good throughout the school. Students of different ages, genders, attainments and from different ethnic backgrounds generally get on well together, encouraged by the school's inclusive ethos. They are able to rise above the degraded nature of much of their surroundings and willingly adopt the higher aspirations the school tries to instil. Movement around the school is reasonably orderly, even when corridors are impeded by students awaiting their next lesson. Students describe the school as a friendly community. Bullying is reported to occur but is not found to be a major problem, as incidents are generally considered to be handled effectively when reported to the school.
18. In most lessons, most students concentrate on their work but in a minority, typically where a long-term relationship with the teacher is not well established, some students disrupt the class by excessive chatter or other activities that require the teacher to intervene. However, the school has extensive and effective strategies for addressing the needs of students who exhibit challenging behaviour and minimising their impact on other students, involving interventions by senior staff, support from specialised units within the school and from outside agencies, and modifications of the curriculum. It is a tribute to the success of the school's multifarious strategies that no students were excluded permanently in the last year. Similarly, the school can point to strong evidence of the successful reintegration into classes of some students who were near to final exclusion because of unruly behaviour. Most of the challenging behaviour comes from White UK boys and contributes to the underachievement of some of these students'.
19. The school's strong support for students who arrive with very low literacy skills, specific learning difficulties and some behavioural difficulties is helpful in raising the self-esteem of many students. Some students spoken to were proud of the improvement they have made in reading and writing since joining the school.

20. Religious education provides good opportunities for the spiritual development of students and opportunities are provided in other subjects to enhance this feature of personal development, especially in art, geography and the performing arts. Students have a respect for the beliefs of others and have a clear understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and develop an understanding of different faiths. They are aware of right and wrong actions and know what is expected of them. They respond positively when corrected. Students work well together and opportunities are provided for them to express their views in paired work, group work and general discussion. The school works hard to develop students' sense of self-esteem, which is often very low, and they develop as responsible members of the community. Students are aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. The lack of co-ordination of students' spiritual, moral and social development across the curriculum works against a planned approach to this aspect of students' personal development.
21. Students who have English as an additional language have good attitudes to learning. They respond well as they gain confidence. Students' self-esteem and their sense of cultural identity has been raised by English as an additional language staff by valuing and promoting bilingualism and cultural diversity. Older students help younger students regularly with their reading. The co-ordinator for the gifted and talented programme indicates that students appreciate the support and recognition of their work. Their self-esteem and confidence increases as a result.

Sixth form

22. Students' attitudes to the school are positive. A significant proportion of students spoke to inspectors during lessons and more formal discussions. Students identified closely with the school and spoke highly of the support they receive in the sixth form. The sixth form is a well-integrated and outward-looking community. Much is done to extend the boundaries of knowledge and understanding through very effective local and metropolitan links with schools, industry and higher education organisations.
23. The good levels of personal support offered by teachers help students to recognise the importance of enhancing their learning skills. Even so, a significant minority are slow to assume responsibility for their own learning. Overall, students appreciate their school and value their own involvement in the process of sixth form education. A significant number of students are the first representatives of their families to enter a sixth form and to aim for higher education.
24. Although students have high ambitions, many lack the disciplined personal study habits to do justice to their own abilities when they enter the sixth form. The school recognises the need to inculcate a strong work ethic. Plans are in hand to improve the quality of academic monitoring and the new system of academic reviews is a first step in this process. At present, the school does not have the study facilities to accommodate all sixth form students during free periods. A new post-16 learning centre, which is planned to open in September 2004, will greatly enhance current provision.
25. The personal development of students is good. Students may choose to assume responsibilities and to work with younger students in lessons at the school or assist at local primary schools. An opportunity exists to voice an opinion and to initiate ideas through the school council. Students relate well to one another as part of a friendly and harmonious community. They make significant gains in confidence during their time in the sixth form and demonstrate a well-developed ability to listen to one another and to shape ideas within a group. They are good ambassadors in respect of their commitment and loyalty to the school. Overall, they respond well to the strong corporate ethos and the shared values of the school that are based on mutual respect.

26. Various activities are open to students through a designated weekly enrichment programme. Although the arts and sports are poorly represented in this programme, practical courses leading to certification are offered in areas such as word processing and first aid. Sixth formers contribute to drama productions, concerts and other school events.
27. Overall, the school prepares students effectively for entry to tertiary education. In 2003, over 70 per cent of students went on to further study at universities and colleges of higher education.

Attendance

28. The school works hard to ensure that students and their families agree the importance of regular attendance, so that in most cases students come to school when they should. In the last academic year, the rate of attendance was broadly in line with the national average but the rate of unauthorised absence was above the national median.⁴ Some school is missed for family holidays. The overall statistics disguise the fact that the attainment and progress of some students, particularly in Year 11 and 12, is affected because of their frequent absence. This makes it more difficult for teachers and slows the learning of their peers. Students who are in school are generally punctual for lessons.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.3	School data	1.2
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Exclusions

29. The school works hard to avoid permanent exclusion. The 'short sharp shock' of fixed-period exclusion seems to work effectively with students from Indian, Pakistani and other Asian heritage and for most girls. White British boys seem more likely to re-offend. Students targeted for behaviour support in the learning support unit, Connect,⁵ and on the register for this form of support, are almost exclusively White UK boys.

Ethnic background of pupils⁶

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – any other Black background

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
771	120	0
16	7	0
348	8	0
37	3	0
8	1	0
24	3	0
33	4	0
3	9	0

⁴ The judgements are not solely based on the national figures shown in the table.

⁵ The school uses the term Connect to describe the learning support unit (LSU)

⁶ These figures relate to the previous academic year. There are currently 1327 on roll.

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Students' good achievement is because teaching is good. It is also due to the fact that the school makes every effort to ensure that what is taught is relevant to the students and fosters their chances of success and also provides them with very good care and support.

Teaching and learning

There is good teaching across the school. The school has a very large core of experienced staff who are very committed to the students. The school does have significant difficulties in staff recruitment that causes disruption to some students' learning, although the school manages this well to minimise the impact as far as possible.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The friendly nature of the school and the very positive relationships that exist are a key factor in the way members of staff encourage and engage students
- There is much good practice in departments across the school that need to be shared and consistently adopted by all staff

Commentary

30. The quality of teaching in the main school is good and leads to good learning in lessons. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science and in all subjects it is never less than satisfactory and more often good. In the sample seen, there was a higher proportion of good or better teaching, approximately 75 per cent, in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form.
31. The key characteristics which made for good teaching are:
 - The good relationships that exist between teachers and students. This is a key element in the good learning at the school. Students at Mellow Lane tend to work for 'their' teacher and the long-term relationships that develop, with all the encouragement and support that staff give very willingly, along with the consistency of expectations that result, lead to improved learning. Teachers are not easily transferable because of this. Because of their positive relationships, members of staff manage students well and insist on good standards of behaviour. Generally, there is a calm work ethic in classrooms
 - Teachers have, in the main, good subject expertise. They plan effectively, although in some lessons expectations and the level of challenge could be higher, particularly for those students identified on the register of gifted and talented. Schemes of work are planned in modules
 - Some subject areas have formed particularly good working partnerships with teacher assistants (TAs) and in those cases they support the learning well. The school has managed to recruit a number of TAs and learning mentors whose life experience allows them to make a significant contribution. For example, in the Prince's Trust XL, a scheme catering for disaffected youngsters, the fact that the 'teachers' are experienced youth workers allows them to adopt an alternative approach with greater ease
 - Adoption of National Strategies, seen at their most effective in mathematics and English, are also beginning to have an impact on other subjects
 - Using assessment as an effective aid to engage students in their own learning has been adopted well in some subjects but is not yet always used consistently. Students do not always know what it is that they have to do in order to improve. The quality of marking is variable across the school and does not often refer to the targets that have been identified. Developing a more consistent approach with regard to this aspect of assessment, for example, by sharing grade and level criteria, will help tackle students' over-dependence on the teacher. Again, whilst some good practice was seen, where students were actively

engaged in the lesson, a few teachers tend to fall back on a lecturing style, which reinforces student passivity

- Students tend to lack independent learning skills so that, whilst good learning may take place in lessons, the fact that students are not taking real responsibility for their own learning diminishes the impact of the good teaching over time. Students need more specific help in structuring their learning. Some departments run homework clubs to try and tackle this problem. However, participation rates are low because in the headteacher's judgement about half of the students are primary carers for their family after school
- The report has highlighted that many students find the use of Standard English difficult, along with the generation of ideas. Teachers tend not to correct slang, press for extended answers to questions or provide sufficient opportunities to structure and support extended writing in subjects other than English. Sometimes, teachers tend to use a formulaic approach of a brief class discussion on a topic before setting students to write, without sufficient time in between to discuss in pairs and groups. In general, insufficient opportunities are given for students to explore, rehearse and present their ideas before moving on to writing. There needs to be a more consistent 'press' by teachers for students to give extended answers to questions using a formal register. The expertise of English as an additional language staff could be used more strategically for the benefit of all students. The development of students' speaking skills is identified as major development within the school's improvement plan and is a key issue in the Excellence in Cities Cluster

32. There is much good practice in the school that needs to be shared, and more consistent approaches adopted, within and between departments. However, this is made much more difficult because of the problems the school has in staff recruitment. This is a key issue for the Excellence in the Cities cluster and is a common feature within these schools. The headteacher cites it as major handicap in the school's development. It causes discontinuities in students' learning, as reflected in the fact that the majority of unsatisfactory teaching seen was by teachers who were relatively new to the school, often supply teachers, who were still in the process of forging a relationship with their class. In the sample of lessons seen, almost all the unsatisfactory lessons were in Years 7 to 9, reflecting the fact that the school managed its staffing to protect examination groups. There is a severe drain on departments' energies as they cope with the day-to-day problem of briefing staff to 'cover' a lesson.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 186 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	35 (19%)	85 (46%)	53 (28%)	12 (6%)	0	1 (1%)

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.

33. The overall provision for English as an additional language is good. There are two part-time teachers and bilingual assistants, who have specialist knowledge, which enables them to assess and understand the individual academic and linguistic needs of their students and give specific English as an additional language support to the most needy. It is effective on an individual or small group basis. Withdrawal from classes is kept to the minimum. The quality of teaching is good and is linked to the National Curriculum. Relationships between staff and students are good. Teaching staff working in a support role concentrate on a small number of targeted students, mainly in English, mathematics and science lessons. More strategic use could be made of these specialist teachers to spread good practice, such as partnership teaching, across the school.
34. English as additional language teachers assess students' understanding on entry and set targets for them which are reviewed regularly based on assessments made. Given the

mobility of staff, many subject teachers, however, have insufficient strategies to meet students' specific needs. Teachers of English as an additional language and other staff enable students' access to the curriculum by a variety of teaching strategies: the use of first language or second language, the use of bilingual dictionaries and school-made or acquired materials, teaching in small groups in classes and on a one-to-one basis and helping them to understand the lesson.

35. The teaching and learning experienced by students with special educational needs when withdrawn from classes are very good. The teachers are well qualified, experienced and committed to providing a high level of support for individuals and small groups of students. They diagnose the needs of students well; they plan lessons appropriately to meet the National Curriculum requirement for the age group. As a result, most students make good progress. Time is used very effectively to ensure that students progress well in each lesson. The main focus of withdrawal is in Years 7, 8 and 9.
36. Teaching assistants allocated to subject areas help students with special educational needs to make at least satisfactory and in most areas good progress in lessons. There is particularly successful support in geography and history, where this is well-established practice.

Sixth form

37. The overall standard of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. In over two-thirds of the lessons observed, teaching and learning were good or better. Teachers plan well and set clear objectives for their students. They use their own good subject expertise effectively. Tasks are appropriate and provide good opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking skills. Good classroom relationships with groups of students underpin the best teaching seen in the sixth form. Students make the most significant gains in knowledge and understanding where lessons provide them with the structure to make sense of new information. Overall, students need help in developing their independence and in acquiring the confidence to challenge assumptions.
38. Teachers' positive expectations of what students should achieve inspire students to increase their efforts. Assignments are set regularly and are well planned to extend and consolidate classroom learning. The support offered to students with special educational needs is very good.
39. In most subject areas, assessment is used well to ensure that students are clear about the standard of their work and what they must do in order to improve their performance. Assessment practice is particularly effective in science, history and geography, where it is used well to develop students' independence. In some subject areas there is a need for more overt sharing of grade criteria.
40. Overall, there is a manifest commitment to individuals. Teachers know their students well. Where opportunities arise, many are generous in investing personal time to continue academic discussions outside lessons. Based on inspectors' discussions with students, it is clear that students consider that teaching is a key strength. They particularly value the accessibility of their teachers and their readiness to offer substantial individual help and advice.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in the main school has many distinctive and enterprising features. The needs of students are at the heart of the curriculum. The strengths of the very good curriculum well outweigh the weakness that the school does not provide enough time for religious education to meet the needs of the locally Agreed Syllabus and meet its statutory obligations. In this specific respect the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Aspects of the accommodation are poor.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A well-structured curriculum is offering students opportunities to meet a range of local business, industry and education representatives
- Although some changes have been made, accommodation is currently poor
- There are exceptionally good links between the school, national organisations, local schools and higher and further educational institutions
- Students progress well from Year 7 to Year 11 because careful curriculum planning, which is linked to their aspiration and preparation for life

Commentary

41. Students benefit from an exciting and enterprising curriculum, in which a wide range of vocational and academic courses prepares them exceptionally well for life and for the next phase of education. The needs of students are at the heart of curriculum planning, the key priority of the strategic plan. This is because the primary aim of the school is to raise students' aspiration for learning beyond post-16. The school is at present seeking specialist status within humanities. It has gained the prestigious Schools Council Award, one of only four schools nationally to do so on four separate occasions, in recognition of its creative curriculum.
42. The school has fully exploited national and local initiatives to widen the opportunities available for students, including those at risk of exclusion. The curriculum in Years 7 to 11 reflects the priority given to individuals: the provision is underpinned by inclusion and equal access to all that is offered. Year 11 students speak highly of the provision for all students. Almost without exception, the curriculum has breadth and balance; it does not, however, meet the statutory requirements for religious education. In this specific respect the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The provision for personal health and social education, including sex and drugs education, is sound.
43. Although ICT is taught and assessed as a discrete subject, there are issues of access, which limits its use across all subjects. A key feature of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is the development of the literacy and numeracy strategies to raise standards in English and mathematics. There is a clear progressive route, which begins with the transition period from Year 6 to Year 7. The school uses the summer school very effectively to begin identifying students' needs and supporting them before they begin Year 7. Forward planning allows the school to provide a comprehensive programme for students with special needs, the gifted and talented, and those at the early stage of learning English as an additional language.
44. A very wide range of courses is offered in Years 10 and 11 and continued into the sixth form. Students are well informed because of the extensive guidance and consultation. Choices reflect careful analysis of students' needs and include academic subjects and a rich selection of options such as: ASDAN, the Prince's Trust XL, vocational and applied GCSE courses, health and social care and business education, college link courses and vocational subjects. The school is undoubtedly forward looking and is at the forefront of leading changes and taking advantage of the increased flexibility afforded to schools with regard to the 14 to 19 curriculum. It will shortly be piloting the impending GCSE ASDAN award. Students have opportunities to mix both academic and vocational courses and those who are demotivated are given every opportunity to acquire some qualification. The Certificate of Achievement is also available for lower-attaining students with special needs.
45. Provision for gifted and talented students is good. The procedures for identifying and analysing students' needs are very rigorous, with clear guidelines for supporting, developing and monitoring their progress. There is an array of activities during and after school to develop their gifts and talents. Within the short time of the school establishing the register, it is not usual to find arrangements in place to accelerate learning and win scholarship funding for a talented pupil to attend a renowned academy.

46. All students with special educational needs have access to the full secondary curriculum up to the end of Year 9. A strength of the withdrawal work of students with specific learning difficulties, basic skill and communication and language needs is that it is directed towards the appropriate curriculum for the age group, particularly in English, geography and history. A weakness in basic skill work is that it does not also include numeracy. From the age of 14 about a quarter of students follow the basic curriculum with the ASDAN course as an option.
47. Most students who have English as an additional language have full access to the whole curriculum and are well integrated. Only those who are at the initial stages are withdrawn from classes on a time-limited basis and some also receive support in classes. Some students follow an alternative curriculum such as ASDAN. Some of the students who have English as an additional language also have special educational needs. The paired reading scheme with sixth form student volunteers works well in enabling younger students to catch up with their reading skills. There is a designated room for small group activity and in which resources are stored. This is good, because it enables access and support for students who are new and vulnerable and who have insufficient language skills to seek help elsewhere. There are enough resources for English as an additional language but there are insufficient high quality, culturally relevant visual aids and bilingual resources for the different languages that exist in the school.
48. The school evaluates its curriculum regularly and rigorously and is currently considering further courses to meet the needs of lower and middle ability students. The organisation of the school day is being reviewed because the length of the morning session is proving too long for most students to concentrate well during the last and only period in the afternoon.
49. Opportunities for curriculum enrichment are satisfactory. Students participate in sports, drama, residential fieldwork, art, and mathematics. Academic mentoring takes place in subjects such as English and mathematics. In French, established links with British Airways provide students with the opportunity to make announcements in the taught language at the terminal. Small numbers of students take up the activities because of social demands on their time as primary carers. The school successfully runs paired reading and handwriting sessions but it has yet to create tangible timetabled enrichment activities to target and support more students. There is more success at involving the small number of gifted and talented students in the specialised academic and recreational activities. These are linked to Brunel University. There are organised visits to places of interests and activities in school.
50. Overall, the accommodation is poor in the main school and in the sixth form, though there are much improved facilities in art and design and technology. Whilst some remedial action by the school is possible, overall, the governing body cannot solve the accommodation issues. There is evidence of long-term neglect. Rooms throughout the school are in disrepair externally and internally. The conditions for teaching and learning in physical education, business education and drama are particularly extreme as students are forced to work in appalling conditions. There is a shortage of specialist rooms in subjects such as English and shortage of study space for the sixth form. Throughout the school, the whole environment is unattractive and starkly bleak. Despite the best efforts of the school to procure funding, the poor accommodation is affecting students' achievement in that it reinforces their already low self-esteem - a view that they are not important. A sixth form student remarked that he was surprised that students did not have more pride in their school - given its state this is not at all surprising.
51. Departmental resources are generally satisfactory. Recruitment difficulties are causing staff shortages. Difficulties in recruiting specialists in design and technology over a long period have led to a limited range of expertise to offer all of the materials in the subject. There is a strong and supportive team of technical staff and teaching assistants.

Sixth form

52. The curricular provision for students is good, with the exception that the school does not meet the statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in the sixth form. In this specific respect the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The selection of 14 AS and A2 courses, three AVCE courses, two GNVQ courses and an Access course is well matched to the aspirations and needs of current students; it does much to reflect the school's philosophy of inclusion.
53. The planned curricular provision is particularly good in business education, where students may select from a choice of economics at A level or business AVCE or GNVQ, although the school is currently experiencing staffing difficulties in this area.
54. A course in personal and social education is taught by the form tutor and through sessions organised for both Years 12 and 13 working together. The main areas of study include career planning and preparation for higher education, current affairs and moral issues. A focus is also placed on active citizenship. In this way, students add breadth to their sixth form experience.
55. The overall provision of key skills is made through the different subject areas and through the tutor programme. Students have the opportunity to refine their communication and use of number skills through their subject courses. The use of ICT is variable across the curriculum. However, students' independent work demonstrates that they are competent, autonomous users of ICT.
56. The main part of the Access course is the ASDAN Gold Award Scheme, which provides certification in a wide range of key skills. The Scheme has acquired significant status in the school and students following other courses also participate in the ASDAN programme at either silver, gold or university level.
57. Opportunities also exist for students to be involved in an extensive work-shadowing programme. GNVQ and AVCE placements reflect the vocational interests of the students and often lead to offers of permanent employment. The AS-level work-shadowing programme allows students to participate in some professional placements that reflect their long-term career aspirations.
58. The school is ready to innovate in response to student demand, as illustrated by current curriculum development planning. New vocational courses, such as Health and Social Care, are to be introduced in September 2004 to complement existing provision.
59. Provision for moral, spiritual, social and cultural development through different subject areas, the tutorial programme and the full range of enrichment opportunities, including visiting speakers, is satisfactory.

Sixth form resources

60. Staffing arrangements are satisfactory. Overall, the number of teachers is in good proportion to the number of sixth form students. The expertise and experience of teachers are well suited to the demands of sixth form teaching. Teachers are deployed effectively to provide a balanced curriculum.
61. Students have satisfactory common room space. However, study facilities are limited to the library and a computer suite, both of which may be booked for use with younger students. Due to the pressure on study space, which has been exacerbated by the growing numbers entering the sixth form, the school has introduced a policy of flexible registration. Students may work at home during designated free periods. The new post-16 unit should greatly

alleviate the problems associated with lack of space. It can also be expected to enhance

current provision by providing an environment that will have a positive impact on the self-esteem of sixth form students.

62. The library stock is underused by sixth form students. This reflects a reluctance to read widely in support of different subjects and a lack of independence in approach. The sixth form is adequately resourced with learning materials.

Care, guidance and support

The school cares for students very well. It provides good guidance and support based on extensive monitoring of their progress. Systems for taking students' views into account are effective. Systems for ensuring students' health and safety are sound. The school provides very good support for students with special educational needs.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school develops and maintains a very thorough knowledge of students as individuals and provides very good support for those students with additional needs
- Students are guided well among a wide range of suitable options
- The physical environment contradicts the school's caring ethos
- Students are pleased with the support they receive

Commentary

63. The school takes great care to ensure that the needs of all students are very well understood; this understanding is fundamental to its approach to support, advice and guidance. The acquisition of information about individual students begins while they are still in their primary schools. These are all visited so that students have an early introduction to the people and procedures they will encounter when they transfer, and so that staff from the schools can exchange all the relevant information about academic attainment, special educational needs and personal relationships. Form tutors keep their groups for several years so most get to know their classes well and form good relationships with them. Students are confident to ask their form tutors or other staff for advice.
64. A very close eye is kept on students' academic and personal development. Their attainment is tracked comprehensively. This information is used well to guide students towards suitable courses, but although marking and tracking information is used very well in science and music, more use could be made of it in many subjects to provide work at an appropriate level. Students' contributions to their academic reviews show they develop a good understanding of their own general progress, but the quality and quantity of details, such as that concerning their National Curriculum levels or GCSE grade criteria is known inconsistently across subjects. Together with careers guidance, provided in citizenship lessons and by visiting speakers, and with valuable support from Connexions advisers, students are able to make suitable decisions about the routes they wish to take and the most appropriate courses to follow. The school's arrangements are particularly effective in guiding students through the broad range of options that is offered in order to meet the wide variety of their academic and personal needs.
65. Students are able to play a role in the school through representations to its council, which considers matters of importance to them such as behaviour, study facilities for the sixth form and the state of the toilets.
66. The school has effective systems for dealing with medical needs or accidents. Child protection issues are well considered and handled. Subject departments are required to report annually on safety and the assessment of risk in their areas. However, the school site as a whole would benefit from being viewed with fresh eyes that would notice long-term

degradation and help to set priorities for refurbishment until the environment itself demonstrates the importance the school attaches to its students.

67. The English as an additional language team enables students with limited English who are new to the school to develop good and trusting relationships by providing a safe and caring environment. The teaching and support staff provides access to well-informed support, advice and guidance, based on their good understanding and monitoring of the students' academic and personal circumstances. There are good induction arrangements for them and students are helped to take GCSE examinations in their first language, even though it is not a taught subject in the school; for example, Arabic and Dutch were taken by a Somali student last year.
68. The school provides very good support for students with Statements of Special Educational Needs and others recognised as having particular needs. The 'Connect' unit, for example, helps younger students to reflect on their behaviour in school and to seek solutions to dealing with anger and frustration within classes. Experienced teachers are skilled in diagnosing learning disabilities and providing specialist support to help them make progress. Annual reviews are undertaken with thoroughness and care at appropriate times. The key teacher revises individual education plans each term with the student. Subject teachers receive good information about students' learning and behavioural needs, but very few participate in the setting of targets within the subject area.
69. Assessment information is analysed, disseminated to departments and used effectively to set and evaluate challenging targets for gifted and talented students. The co-ordinator works very closely with departments to monitor students' progress, often going into lessons to observe them. The tracking allows them to intervene immediately at the earliest signs of underachievement. It is too early to assess the success of the programme of work; however, care is being taken to ensure that all students on the register fulfil their potential.

Sixth form

70. The school provides good pastoral support and guidance for its students. The good, and often warm relationships within the sixth form are a significant factor in the support the students receive. The advice given by teachers and tutors is based on a good level of knowledge of each student. Students are kept well informed of their progress and find that their teachers, tutors and other sixth form managers are very accessible.
71. The school provides good information about the courses available in the sixth form. Students find the printed information covering sixth form subjects and courses clear, accurate and helpful.
72. The information and guidance received about higher education is very good. Good links exist with several universities, including the LSE and Imperial College. A progression agreement is in place with the University of Brunel. One successful initiative has been the provision of regular workshops on various aspects of university life, including the entry process, run by the University of Brunel. The quality of careers guidance, including that offered by the Connexions adviser, is also good. Individual students are able to gain good quality work experience either as part of their vocational course or, when appropriate, to support their career progress.
73. The school contributes actively to a significant number of wider partnerships. Links with local business such as the British Airports Authority (BAA) are very good.
74. Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety are satisfactory. There are satisfactory procedures in place for monitoring their attendance and punctuality.

Sixth form assessment and reporting

75. The assessment of students following post-16 courses is, overall, good; with close attention to the requirements of examination specifications. As a result, the students are clearly aware of what they have to achieve. Individual guidance is a strong feature of the assessment process with students well-supported by good and immediate oral feedback in lessons. Day-to-day departmental assessment procedures vary according to subject requirements, but there remain some inconsistencies in practice, particularly with regard to the marking of homework, the early identification of underachievement for students following AS courses, and the overt sharing of grade criteria.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school works hard to maintain its effective partnership with parents. Students benefit from the school's good relationships with other schools and colleges and they also enjoy significant benefits from the school's partnerships with businesses and the wider community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The Family Partnership Team is very effective
- Partnerships with agencies and academic institutions are effective
- A good range of businesses provide significant financial and moral support
- Good quality information is given in reports on students' progress
- There are good links with parents of students with special educational needs

Commentary

76. Parents are mostly satisfied with how their children are educated and cared for. The school has maintained the good relations with parents described in the last inspection report and is consistently over-subscribed. Parents are pleased with the arrangements for new students and the care they receive. They are confident that suitable expectations are made of students and that their teaching enables them to attain good standards. Some parents say they would like better information about their children's progress, but most are happy to approach the school for further information. Parents disagree about the general standard of behaviour but report that incidents of misbehaviour or bullying are usually dealt with well. Inspection evidence generally supports parents' views of the school.
77. The school has developed a Family Partnership Team, which promotes successfully the engagement of families who have their own difficulties or who might otherwise display antipathy towards school, for example by failing to insist on full attendance. These relationships have provided very effective support for students in those families and have led to a significant increase in attendance at parent consultation evenings. Family learning sessions, which take place outside the school day, enable parents to develop their English skills alongside their children. The Extended Schools initiative currently being developed is expected to enhance further the school's pivotal role in the multi-agency support of the local community.
78. Reports on academic and personal progress are addressed to students but also provide good information to parents on how well their children are doing and sustain their involvement in the review and target-setting process. The quality of reporting varies among teachers but most provide a good general view of each pupil's progress in the subject with specific targets and advice on how to achieve them.
79. The school plays an important role in the Hillingdon Excellence Cluster of schools through its wide-ranging and effective support of social inclusion. There are productive partnerships with agencies such as the police and social services, and particularly beneficial support through Connexions, which both helps with advice on careers and provides good support for individuals

experiencing problems. The extensive links with business and other institutions noted in the last inspection report continue to help meet the varied needs of students by providing substantial support for suitable courses, and all students are introduced directly to the world of work through their work experience in local companies and other organisations at the end of Year 10. A range of links with Brunel University benefit students, including as part of their careers programme, in physical education opportunities and for some, as the next stage in their education.

80. The school maintains good links with parents and carers of students with special educational needs. Parents are expected to attend all review meetings and most co-operate fully in the process of review and setting targets. Annual Review meetings are rearranged if parents are unable to attend. The school works closely with the LEA and neighbouring schools to provide the best possible support for students with special needs.
81. The English as an additional language team maintains a good liaison with families and carers and runs a family learning session on Monday evenings, where parents and children can learn together. Parents can learn language and computer skills and students receive help with homework. As the team shares some of the languages spoken by the families, they assist in interpreting when needed.

Sixth form

82. Parents expressed positive views about the education their children receive in the sixth form. Communications are good, as meetings are held regularly and parents receive a good level of information about the progress of their children.
83. Students are positive about the sixth form. They feel that they are very well taught and that the courses provided offer significant choice. They appreciate the importance and impact of the relationships within the sixth form. They are also pleased with the level of individual help and encouragement that they receive from their teachers. Where they would like to see improvement is in the provision of better study facilities and cleaner, improved school buildings. Overall, students value their experience in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

There is sound governance of the school. The leadership of the headteacher and the senior leadership team is very good. Management at senior level is very good. Leadership and management across the school are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body is very supportive of the school yet holds it to account
- The school does not meet statutory requirements with regard religious education
- The school is concerned about individuals and there is a strong corporate sense of a community based on a mutual respect
- Because of the strong leadership there is clear capacity for future developments
- Staffing and recruitment issues are a major barrier to current developments

Commentary

84. Overall, there is sound governance of the school. There are significant strengths. The governing body is very supportive of the school and through its committee structure has a good understanding of its strengths and aspects where further development is needed. Governors bring a range of professional skills and are guided very effectively by the clerk to the governors about local and national issues and the implications for the school. Recruiting new governors is difficult and, currently, parents are under-represented. There is open communication and good, although not cosy, relationships with the senior management and

staff, in that governors are prepared to question and challenge decisions. Because of personal and professional commitments not all governors are able to visit the school; they are however, kept informed through regular reports from the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team and regular presentations to the curriculum committee by heads of department. They monitor the budget effectively and took the decision to produce a deficit budget rather than break up the staffing structure. They, in association with the headteacher, have produced a budget plan that aims to clear the deficit within two years. Whilst the governing body anticipated some financial aspects which they expected would strain the school's budget, the late settlement of the final allocation finally caused them to go into deficit. The governing body find the lack of clarity about budget forecasting in the medium term a difficulty in planning strategically.

85. Members of the governing body are involved in the review of the school improvement plan and in the consultation regarding the strategic direction of the school. Performance management procedures are good and there is strong accountability to the governing body through the line-management systems. The governing body reviews performance data to monitor the school's work. There is a clear focus on enhancing the provision and raising of standards.
86. Set against these strengths are the weaknesses that the school is not meeting statutory requirements, in that within the World Issues programme there is insufficient time to fully meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus with regard to religious education across the school. In addition, there is no religious education in the sixth form. Development of a citizenship programme, which would presumably include a significant religious education programme, is identified as a required improvement in the school's self-evaluation.
87. In addition, the school is not meeting the statutory requirement to hold an act of daily collective worship. The governing body's position is that: 'non-denominational assemblies concentrate on a series of moral themes and highlight the school as a community. A serious topic or issue will be followed by a period of quiet reflection.' (School prospectus). Lack of hall-space prevents this from being a daily event. The governing body expects all students to have two assemblies a week, with tutor periods for the remainder, in which issues relating to moral, community or individual's issues can be discussed or followed up.
88. There is very good leadership by the headteacher, based on a strong belief that the school should meet the needs of its students. The school's inclusivity and strong corporate sense of a community based on mutual respect stems from him. The school has genuine warmth, stemming from its friendliness and the support of staff for one another. For many staff there is a deep emotional commitment to the school and what it is seeking to do. All staff - office, support and teachers - display particular loyalty to the school and to the students and work very hard on their behalf. Communication is open and the headteacher is accessible. Individuals matter, and he gives every appearance of knowing most students in the school. He handles issues with equanimity and fairness. As a result, the school has integrity and a clear ethos.
89. The headteacher is very skilled at bidding for and gaining funds - he has very astute financial skills and is very good at applying best value principles. Raising students' standards, both academic and personal, is central to what the school is about. He is highly respected by staff, students and the local education authority. His strategic leadership of the EiC is not a distraction but is enhancing his and the school's development because the key issues are key aspects relevant to the school. There is very effective teamwork at senior level. The headteacher is supported very effectively by the senior leadership team and by the good leadership across the school. The senior leadership's strategic thinking is taking the school forward in a clear direction so that developments are coherent rather than an accretion of good ideas. Development planning is in the process of significant change and a much tighter, more sophisticated project management approach is being adopted; although not yet embedded, this will help sharpen department development planning. The curriculum leadership at senior level is very good. Across the school, leaders are good role models for other staff and

students. Because of the strong leadership across the school there is clear capacity for further improvement.

90. Monitoring and evaluation is also very good so that senior leaders have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The school's self-evaluation for the inspection was open, frank and accurate. The school improvement plan identifies the key issues for improvement identified in the inspection. Monitoring at department level is good, although within the wealth of data, identification of key sets of data which give clear overall pictures linked to national rates of progress will further raise expectations.
91. Managing the day-to-day issues surrounding severe recruitment problems, which are exacerbated by neighbouring boroughs being able to pay inner London rates, drains leadership energies as well as being a major barrier to development over time. The headteacher and the governing body are using all possible strategies with a strong focus on staff development and it is a key priority within the EiC cluster. The school has been very successful in attracting high quality personnel in mentoring, TA and support staff.
92. Management at senior level is very good and it is good across the school. Financial planning and control are very good. Financial planning is clearly linked to targets in the school's strategic plan. In an area where the recruitment and retention of staff is difficult the proportion of the budget spent on staffing is high. In recent years this has led to deficit budgets being set. However, this was done to maintain continuity of teaching. Systems for financial control are very well established. The last audit, in 1999, did not have any recommendations for improvement. Principles of best value are very well applied. There are clear examples where the school has challenged its own performance after comparison with similar schools. This led, for example, to a marked improvement in test results at the end of Year 9 between 1998 and 2002. The school competes very effectively. By acting as its own project manager on recent building projects, for example, it has been able to save considerable sums. Consultation with students and parents is good but needs to be developed further.
93. The school has well-managed systems for promoting the students' performance and for supporting their progress at senior level consistently. The school has very thorough whole-school systems and procedures to assess and track students' attainment, including those for post-16 students. The leadership group makes very good use of the school's rich body of performance data when reviewing the work of departments. All subjects contribute regular assessments to the central records. Students' work is clearly graded using National Curriculum levels and sub-levels, and this information is shared effectively with students so that they and their parents are clearly aware of their progress against clear starting targets based on accurate data. Frequent review points provide an overview across all curriculum areas of the students' achievements. This information is readily available to heads of year and accessible to heads of subjects so that they can monitor relative performances. More consistent use across the departments of the good practice seen in assessment in day-to-day teaching - to reinforce targets and clarify to students more precisely the subject specifics of what they have to do in order to progress to the next level or grade - will complete the picture. The co-operative working of pastoral and academic staff at all levels sustains the school's high expectations of what individual students can achieve.
94. Leadership of English as an additional language is good. Both part-time teachers and part-time support staff are suitably deployed to teach where the need is greater, but its effectiveness across the school needs a better strategic focus and spread of good practice. The present work of the English as an additional language team gets effective support and regular monitoring of performance by the senior staff in the Individual Learning department and the school adds some of its own resources to fund this provision. The team leader maintains and updates the register of students who receive English as an additional Language support and their stages of language development. Teachers undertake regular reviews of pupil progress and help them to be fully integrated into the mainstream.

95. The organisation and management of support for students with special educational needs is very good. A team of well-qualified and experienced specialist teachers provides effective teaching and support for students with a wide range of needs.
96. The overall provision for gifted and talented students is good. The management of the provision is good. The co-ordinator is well informed about students' needs and constantly keeps up-to-date with materials. She has established good links with the Brunel University to broaden and enrich students' academic and general interests.

Sixth form

97. The senior leadership of the school provides a clear educational vision for the development of the sixth form, which is reflected in the commitment to raise standards and improve accommodation.
98. The quality of leadership in the sixth form could not be judged at the time of the inspection due to the long-term sickness of the head of sixth. The sixth form managers ensure that daily administrative arrangements, systems and procedures work well.
99. The sixth form is an important part of the school as a whole. Students are known well individually and benefit from good levels of personal support. Sixth form managers are accessible and generous with time. They balance professionalism with a genuine interest in their students. Those students joining the school in Year 12 are provided with a good level of support. Induction arrangements are currently being reviewed in order to enhance the levels of expectation and challenge on entry to the sixth form.
100. The school's strategies for monitoring sixth form performance are also being upgraded. Overall, planning for change and improvement and evaluation of outcomes are effective in ensuring the strategic development of the sixth form. Funding is used in a cost-effective way to give students a good quality of teaching and educational experience. Course completion and overall course retention rates are monitored closely.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	5,254,934.00
Total expenditure	5,392,699.00
Expenditure per pupil	4,066.89

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	3,137.00
Balance carried forward to the next	-8,331.00

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

- Students achieve very well by Year 11
- Teaching is good, overall, and, over time, students achieve better than expected because teachers are using the Key Stage 3 Strategy well to improve standards
- The quality of leadership and management are good and a strong team of specialists has evolved
- The quality of marking is very good but there is insufficient use of data and assessment criteria to challenge students further
- Students' lack of security in oral skills and written expression is preventing them from gaining higher results

Commentary

101. Results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were average when compared with all and also similar schools. These results represent satisfactory achievement for students. Test results are improving and are above the national trend. The standards sustained over the last two years are a striking improvement on the previous years' results, when they were well below average. Higher-attaining students performed particularly well in 2003. Boys are achieving better than girls.
102. Standards at the end of Year 11 in the 2003 GCSE English examination were just below the national average but well above for similar schools. The GCSE English literature results were well below average. The decline is unusual and cannot be accounted for. However, the English results are a significant improvement since the last inspection. Boys achieve better than girls. Whereas boys' results mirror the average for boys nationally, girls are performing much lower than girls nationally. Results at the end of Years 9 and 11 indicate that most minority ethnic groups, including speakers of English as additional language are achieving much better than White British students.
103. Inspection evidence confirms that students make more progress in Years 10 and 11 when skills are consolidated. When students enter the school, literacy skills are below average with a significant number having low reading ages. Progress is better than expected because of the good quality teaching and expertise when using the Key Stage 3 Strategy and Booster materials to improve reading and analytical writing skills. Target-setting, curriculum planning and support and guidance have also been used radically to raise standards.
104. Overall, standards in speaking are below average but listening skills are good. They listen well with concentration and understanding but responses, though given confidently, are brief. There are a number of passive learners and far too many students use informal language when speaking. Consequently, they use a limited vocabulary and most do not use talk well to explore their learning. By the end of Year 9, reading skills are satisfactory for most students but good for the higher-attaining students, who use evidence effectively and focus critically on a writer's use of language. Other students complete comprehension work satisfactorily but do not use or comment on evidence sufficiently. They give personal responses but implicit meanings are not explained in any depth. Year 11 higher-attaining students read critically and their textual grasp shows engagement and appreciation of a writer's purpose in well-developed

responses to a range of texts. Writing skills are just below average for most students but higher-attaining students write accurately and coherently. Weaknesses in technical features and spelling errors mar students' work and even though planning, drafting and redrafting processes are used extensively, students are not reflective or careful when proofing and editing their work.

105. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers know their subject very well and use the Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve students' reading and reading and writing skills. They record the learning objective, key words and concepts as reference points for students, though at times the objectives lack precision. Expectations of behaviour and work are established, which encourage students to work well and make good progress. They challenge students through close questioning and a variety of reading and writing activities that enable them to develop their language skills. In particular, teachers foster a greater level of independence among higher-attaining students through their group work, research and presentations. There is not a sharp enough focus on oral work and using assessment criteria to raise students' aspirations. Of the two unsatisfactory lessons, teaching lacked sufficient challenge and pace. Marking is very thorough and students know what they must do to improve.
106. The leadership and management of the department are good. Clarity of vision is leading to the introduction of media studies as an option and better provision for middle- and lower-attaining students. Curriculum planning is a key feature, with attention to literature from other cultures and using ICT and numeracy. There is however, limited access to ICT. Strategic planning, the use of data and assessment at present lack rigour to drive standards further. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. There are too many split classes and insufficient time for formally monitoring teaching and learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen; teaching is good and a dedicated and stable team characterises this strong department.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

107. The Key Stage 3 Strategy has been used effectively to drive up standards in English. However, across the school, literacy skills are below average, overall. The school is therefore involved in action research with Oxford Brookes University and the EiC to improve speaking and listening and writing skills across the curriculum. It is too early to assess the impact of teaching and learning styles on students' work. There are good, and sometimes very good examples of creative and experimental extended writing in English and geography. In ICT, students write evaluative comments about websites. Subjects such as modern foreign languages emphasise grammatical terms to improve students writing skills. There is good emphasis on using writing frames in geography. However, these are not used in mathematics, where written explanation is often weak in coursework. Standards in writing skills are hampered because marking lacks consistency and clear direction for improvement. Teachers stress specialist vocabulary but students do not always understand them and many lack the skills of explanation. Students are not well versed in the rich literary tradition. Although the English department and librarian are promoting reading and study skills, most students do not use the library facilities well. Most do not explain their ideas at length and there are insufficient opportunities to develop good oral skills. Boys do not always listen very carefully.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**, with some good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in French and German are above average and students achieve well in Years 10 and 11
- Teaching is good, overall, in Years 10 and 11
- Support staff are native speakers and are very well used in all lessons
- Standards are below average in Years 7 to 9 and, while achievement is satisfactory, overall, some groups of students are underachieving
- Students in Years 7 to 9 are not clear enough about expectations and do not receive enough constructive feedback on their progress
- The number of students choosing to continue with a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11 is very low

Commentary

108. GCSE results were above average in both French and German in 2003, though the number of students entered for the examinations was well below the national average. However, students performed better in both languages than they did in other subjects. Results have improved, particularly in German, since the last inspection.
109. In work seen during the inspection standards were below average in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 they were average in German and above average in French. The standards achieved by high-attaining students in Year 9 are variable. Many are developing a secure grasp of tenses but others have standards of written accuracy that are below expectations. Overall, students lack confidence orally and have few opportunities to produce extended speech. The example of a Year 9 German class who were able to talk at length using all three main tenses and demonstrating a good understanding of word order was a rare one. However in Years 10 and 11 students develop writing skills that are above average. High-attaining students, in both languages, are able to use tenses, more complex structures and a wide range of vocabulary with a good level of accuracy. Average and low-attaining students are relatively secure in their use of the three main tenses. Whilst the overall standard is higher in French than in German, students in German lessons have more opportunities for oral practice and are more confident orally.
110. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in both languages in Years 10 and 11. Overall, students in Years 7 to 9 develop satisfactory writing skills but, in many cases, they do not have enough opportunity for oral practice. Some students achieve well. Students with special educational needs make good progress because they are very well assisted in class by support staff. Students with English as an additional language also achieve well as do high-attaining students in Year 8. In one class, for example, students were able to write at length and express opinions with a good level of accuracy. However, there is underachievement by high-attaining students in Year 7. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 because teachers have high expectations.
111. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, overall. They are good in Years 10 and 11. Students learn well because lessons are well planned. Work in lessons builds on previous learning. There is a clear focus for each lesson and a strong emphasis on developing listening, reading and writing skills, though opportunities for developing oral skills are limited in many lessons. Support staff are very competent and are very well used. Good relationships in most lessons ensure that most students are well motivated.

112. Learning is good in most lessons in Years 10 and 11 and in some lessons in Years 7 to 9 because expectations are high. This leads to challenging work, to which students respond well. In other lessons, however, the pace is often slow and there is a lack of variety of activities that affects students' motivation. In many lessons in Years 7 to 9 teachers do not use the target language enough.
113. Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because teachers take time to explain to them what they need to do to achieve their target grades. However, in Years 7 to 9, students are often not clear about National Curriculum levels and so do not know what to do to improve. In all years students' progress is well monitored by teachers. Marking of work is generally thorough but teachers rarely use marking to explain how students can improve the quality of their work.
114. Leadership and management are satisfactory, overall. This is a very cohesive team of teachers who support each other well. Schemes of work give effective guidance and help ensure consistency. However, systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching are not well developed. The department does not use information about students to evaluate its performance and there is no link between evaluation of performance and development planning. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in mathematics by the end of Year 9. Standards are in line with national figures
- Standards at the end of Year 11 are close to national expectations. Most students achieve satisfactory results in GCSE examinations
- Teaching is good, overall; teachers are committed to helping their students to do well and relationships are very good
- Teachers miss opportunities to assess students' progress towards their targets, particularly in homework and other written work
- The leadership and management of the department are good and this has raised teachers' expectations of what students can achieve

Commentary

115. Standards in mathematics are close to national expectations by the end of Year 11. Students' attainment in mathematics when they enter the school is below average. Results in the national tests for Year 9 have been consistently in line with the national average over several years. In 2003, the students' rate of progress was well above the average for schools with a similar starting point. Standards in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were close to the national average, with both boys and girls achieving successfully in mathematics. However, although most groups of students achieve satisfactorily, able students do not necessarily gain grades as high as expected, partly because coursework marks are too low.
116. Inspection evidence indicates that overall standards in Year 9 are close to the national average. Achievement in lessons is generally at least in line with expectations and the work in the students' books, including those who have special educational needs, reflects consistently steady progress across the expected areas of mathematics. Many students have weak numerical skills when they enter the school and these are developed well across the early years so that higher-attaining students extend such processes into good manipulative algebra skills. Work on shape and space and data-handling is sound, but graph-drawing skills are underdeveloped with sometimes poor presentation. A significant proportion of the students

find it difficult to interpret graphs, and to give reasons for their answers, partly the result of low literacy skills.

117. By the end of Year 11, students achieve satisfactorily, overall, with the majority making at least the expected progress from Year 9. Coursework tasks are conscientiously completed but contain few imaginative or independent ideas, particularly in the data-handling project. Generally, students can readily spot patterns, and this supports work on probability, simple linear equations and on angle facts, for example. However, some students, including those in higher sets, do not readily apply routine skills to problem-solving tasks or unfamiliar situations.
118. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good, overall. Working relationships are very good and all teachers are committed to helping students achieve their best. Students learn well because of the high expectations of teachers in Years 7 to 9. In GCSE classes, learning is supported by the focus on examination specifications, but further structured revision prior to module tests would benefit some students. The best lessons are carefully structured and provide a wide range of learning opportunities: as in a probability lesson for Year 9, an algebra lesson for Year 7 and a lesson on transformations for Year 11. In the less successful lessons, teachers do not plan sufficiently precise learning outcomes, nor do activities engage students fully, so that some become restless and misbehave. Generally, students have too few opportunities to articulate their thinking. In some lessons, particularly with older year groups, insufficient attention is given to assessing accurately what students have learned as a result of teaching. Nevertheless, most students co-operate well with their teachers and are willing to apply themselves in lessons, although still relying heavily on their teachers.
119. The use of day-to-day assessment in mathematics is satisfactory, overall, but requires some improvement. All teachers set homework frequently and regularly. Most students receive helpful and immediate oral feedback on their work in lessons and there are examples of good quality diagnostic marking that enable students to improve their work. However, marking is often unrelated to the students' targets and misses opportunities to ensure that errors and misunderstandings are revisited. Teachers' use of assessment information in planning lessons is inconsistent across the department and students' achievements in module tests are not always analysed in enough detail to support future improvements.
120. The quality of leadership of mathematics is a strength. The head of department has a clear vision for its development and has encouraged a committed team approach. However, there are missed opportunities within mathematics to enrich the students' experience of mathematics through, for example, greater use of library resources and a more extensive use of ICT resources. The department is well managed, and day-to-day running is smooth. While the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department is satisfactory, more could be done to develop a wider range of teaching and learning approaches. Since the last inspection, progress within the mathematics department has been good. Standards have risen significantly and teaching has remained good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

121. There is good provision within mathematics to develop students' numeracy skills alongside other aspects of the subject. At whole-school level, staff training, together with a comprehensive numeracy policy and clear guidance on methods of calculation and pictorial representation, has resulted in departments integrating elements of numeracy into schemes of work. Students have some opportunities to use these skills across other curricular areas. For example, students' mathematical competence supports work successfully in geography where younger year groups use scales to work out distances on maps. Older students are able to interpret statistics on climate in relation to tourist development and population distributions. In English, students use bar graphs and tally charts, although not always with sufficient technical accuracy. Students' mathematical skills are adequate to support their work in ICT in choosing appropriate graphs and in the use of formulae in spreadsheets. Measuring tasks in design and technology for a Year 9 group indicated that some students fail to use rulers accurately.

122. Overall provision for mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory but there is still a need to monitor and evaluate the impact of this provision in supporting the development and use of the students' numerical skills.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results have shown a marked improvement because of the strong team approach towards driving up standards. Year 9 targets have been exceeded significantly
- Thorough analysis of test and examination results keenly judges the department's performance and tracks individual students' progress well, to consistently check their achievements
- Very good relationships between teachers and students create a happy atmosphere for learning, but skills of investigation are not developed fully during class experiments. There is insufficient application of ideas
- Creative involvement of students in imaginative endings to lessons is limited

Commentary

123. Year 9 test results were average in 2003 when compared with all schools, and above average compared with similar schools. This was a significant improvement on previous years, notably outstripping targets. Boys performed better than girls. Almost all in the class who studied the separate sciences achieved A* to C grades at GCSE; consequently, results in top grades were well below average in the double science award but almost everyone passed the examination.
124. Current standards in Year 9 are, overall, average. This represents good achievement for many students in relation to when they started at the school. The progress they make is linked to the quality of teaching. Students with special educational needs acutely sharpened their understanding of what happens to particles as two different chemicals diffuse together, because of the expert skills of the assistant teacher in helping them, and their teacher's very good knowledge of their individual needs. High-attaining students in Year 9 clearly justified the position of different alkali metals on the Periodic Table because their teacher's skilful, swift questions caused them to do so. Through the Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education Project (CASE), students in Year 8 learning more about 'change of state' are encouraged to deepen their observations and then decide themselves why stearic acid reacted differently from iodine when heated. However, class experiments are usually structured and guided by teachers, which limits understanding of experimental method. Students answer leading questions from textbooks rather than explaining conclusions themselves.
125. Standards in Year 11 are average and achievement, overall, satisfactory, although there are noticeable variations in this picture. The progress Year 10 students make has been keenly tracked since they were in Year 7 and so they have become used to working towards specific goals that they know are achievable yet move them on. Lower-attaining students in Year 10 accurately represented the atomic structure of various elements because of their teacher's crystal clear explanations. High-attaining students in Year 11 underachieved because, owing to ineffective planning, they spent too much time repeating work of earlier years on neutralisation, which they fully understood. Exercise books, however, show insufficient application of ideas. Investigative skills are also underdeveloped because they need more emphasis in earlier years.
126. The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. Teachers and students get on well together and this close rapport substantially helps students to understand difficult work. Standards are also especially raised because of the strong teamwork between teachers and classroom assistants. Teachers usually show very good knowledge in their questioning,

explanations and in the tasks they set. The lesson on diffusion in Year 9, for example, included a demonstration to focus upon a reaction between ammonia and an acid that needed an explanation and, opportunities for students to work individually and together to check their learning. When resources are used well, students can 'visualise' an idea better to understand it. Students' learning is also strongly linked to their own good attitudes, which endure through lessons that occasionally lack stimulus. High quality comments on classwork are helpful to students in their learning but checks that they have been acted upon are not routine. Expectations about the quality of presentation and accuracy of two-dimensional diagrams are too low. There is also scope for creatively involving students in imaginative endings of lessons to help them consolidate learning.

127. Leadership and management are good. The relatively new head of department is supported very well by the assistant headteacher. Members of staff are equally committed to building a high performance team. This strong collaboration is countering some of the problems caused by difficulties in staffing. Strong technical support significantly contributes to the team. Students' performance is meticulously analysed and assessment information used well in identifying expertly targets for students and the department. There has been good improvement since the last inspection through tracking individual pupil's progress, from which teaching and learning are monitored effectively. Lower school schemes have been reviewed and almost all laboratories have been refurbished, although facilities for displaying students' work are limited.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leading to good achievement at GCSE
- Behaviour of some students in Years 7 to 9 impedes learning
- Low level questioning, bringing about a lack of challenge especially to higher-attaining students in years 7 to 9
- Good departmental leadership bringing about improvements in planning and assessment
- Good level of technical support improving the reliability of the school network so that students can learn

Commentary

128. Teachers' assessment in 2003 indicates that standards were below average at the end of Year 9. Work seen during the inspection supports this, although there has been some subsequent improvement. Students enter the school with lower-than-average attainment and so their achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9.
129. Students have good basic skills, especially in communication, through presentations and desktop publishing. Their spreadsheets show that they write sum formulae and replicate them as necessary, but, in their planning, students depend on close direction through leading questions. Written work is descriptive rather than explanatory, with thin support for students' assertions. Standards are lowered in some classes by poor behaviour and failure to listen to teachers' explanations and instructions, so that the pace of work is slow and the level of thinking is unsatisfactory.
130. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were above average; this is reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Overall, achievement is good by the end of Year 11, with students with special educational needs working at levels appropriate for their ability. Girls' work is more thorough, careful and consistent than boys' work. Work in their folders shows that they meet the criteria for GCSE in their planning, evaluation and redrafting.

131. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11, with clear instructions showing very good knowledge of GCSE requirements. They give very good feedback to students about how they can improve their grades. Experienced teachers have formed good relationships with their students, who work hard in lessons. Teachers miss opportunities to extend students' thinking so that superficial reasons are given for their choices and there is not enough challenge to the highest-attaining students, resulting in superficial analysis. The course in Years 7 to 9 is developing from simply learning basic skills to one in which ideas are explored. At present, there is little exploration of principles underpinning the use of ICT, so that students give instant judgements based on their own preferences when designing school guides in Year 7, or in the evaluation of websites in Year 8. Slow pace in some lower school lessons results in unsatisfactory behaviour. Some teachers do not insist that students listen to explanations or instructions.
132. Leadership is good. The team leader is effective in encouraging colleagues to take responsibility for areas of development and to share ideas with a common view of standards. Inexperienced, unqualified and new teachers to the department are well supported. The department works together as an effective team. They have developed good schemes of work and teaching techniques at GCSE. They are beginning to do so in the lower school, where they have not yet found the balance between depth and coverage that would bring about optimum levels of understanding. The department use technical and support staff well to help students to learn. Students' experience is limited by shortage of equipment, such as interactive whiteboards, scanners and digital cameras, but some teachers make good use of the newly installed network demonstration software to direct learning. Improvement since the last inspection is good in that there is a higher proportion of students gaining qualifications in ICT, with a change in the focus of teaching towards greater student understanding of the impact of ICT.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

133. Students' standards are sufficiently good to meet the demands of other subjects. There is good use in design and technology where computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD-CAM) is used by students of all ages. Teachers have good expertise and a positive attitude to the use of ICT. Almost all subjects use ICT, mainly for Internet searches and communication, with some data calculation and analysis, for example, in mathematics and science. As there is only one computer room for regular booking by other subjects they cannot use ICT regularly for all students, but they encourage them to use their own computers or those in the school outside lesson times. Lack of suitable equipment limits learning in music and art.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A highly dedicated staff that work closely as an effective team
- Very good teacher assistants making a significant contribution as part of the team
- A strong focus on raising standards by developing new ideas for teaching and learning
- Good support for students out of lesson time
- Limited fieldwork opportunities
- The profile of the subject limits recruitment and retention of students beyond Year 9

Commentary

134. At the end of Year 9 the teachers' assessment of students' attainment is below national expectations, but this reflects the need for refinement of the criteria of assessment. The observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work indicate that standards are in line with national expectations. Achievement is good, based on the progress that students make between Year 7 and Year 9. They gain knowledge and understanding of environmental hazards, such as the effect of earthquakes in urban environments and use the Internet to gather further information on recent major earthquakes in the world. By the end of Year 9 they begin to deal with more abstract concepts, such as absolute and relative poverty when studying economic development in Ghana.
135. In the 2003 GCSE examinations the percentage of students achieving the higher grades (A* to C) was below the national average. However, there has been a very significant increase over the past three years. In contrast to the national trend, boys have attained results marginally better than girls. By the end of Year 11, students use a range of techniques including statistical analysis when doing individual assignments. In assessing the impact of new shopping facilities in Watford they design questionnaires, use Lorenz curves to illustrate bi-polar analysis of environmental quality and use the computer to generate a range of graphs to show results. Higher-attaining students show insight into the cause and effect of changes within the urban environment in response to consumer demand.
136. All teaching observed during the inspection was good or better. The good subject knowledge of the staff and their experience, for example, in overseas development, are used effectively to guide the students towards enquiry. Work is well planned, with a range of learning skills incorporated. Students design brochures, work in pairs and in groups, prepare presentations on topics and design games to reinforce their learning. Teachers provide opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as citizenship development. A moment of reflection on the feelings of people caught up in the Kobe earthquake produced excellent poetry writing by Year 7 students. Teaching assistants attached to the department are fully involved in lessons, work as a member of a team, and give very good support to both teacher and students. Although the work is differentiated to suit the prior attainment of the students, insufficient focus is given to those identified as gifted and talented.
137. Leadership by the newly appointed head of department is very good. There is a very clear vision for development and a focus on raising standards, which are rising year on year. Very good rapport with the staff, including teaching assistants, ensures co-operative teamwork. The subject is well managed. There are clear areas of responsibility and each member of staff makes a significant contribution to the department. Opportunities for fieldwork and visits to places of geographical interest are limited. Talking to students indicates their desire for fieldwork experience, which will raise the profile of the subject and encourage more students to study the subject beyond Year 9. The use of a visitor from the local authority to discuss the topic of recycling helped to make the subject relevant to the life of the students in Year 10. The students receive good support with homework and projects in the drop-in club after school, and during breaks and lunch-times.
138. Very good Improvements have been made since the last inspection. All issues raised have been fully addressed. Attainment has improved as a result of the use of a wide range of written work, newspaper reports, letters, poetry, glossaries, key words for each topic and very effective assessment procedures. Enquiry skills are now widely planned and used in learning. New initiatives, such as the development of students' language through teaching and learning Strategies and the attachment of teaching assistants to departments, contribute to whole-school development plans.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**, with good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership and administration of the department
- There is a clear commitment to raise standards and heighten interest in the subject
- Teachers deliver lessons that are carefully designed to enhance the development of skills; they make very good use of a variety of resources to promote learning
- The overall standards of attainment at GCSE are well below national expectations
- The department lacks cohesion as all teachers are drawn to senior responsibilities elsewhere in the school

Commentary

139. In 2003, GCSE results were significantly below the national average for all maintained schools. Thirty-seven per cent of students achieved grades A* to C. Girls outperformed boys by a significant margin. In terms of relative performance, these results were amongst the weakest in the school.
140. Inspection evidence shows that students are attaining standards that are just below those expected nationally by the end of Year 9. However, this represents at least satisfactory achievement considering their levels of attainment when they enter the school. Students show interest in the major historical events and personalities they are studying, but many have difficulty in articulating their knowledge. Students appreciate that history is based on evidence and all, including those with special educational needs, can extract information from a variety of written and pictorial sources. Whilst the majority of students develop satisfactory listening skills, a number find difficulty in sustaining their concentration over time. Overall, students take pride in the presentation of their work and in the development of their writing skills.
141. At the end of Year 11, the overall standards attained by students are well below those expected nationally. It is in the generation and organisation of ideas that the majority find their most significant challenge. Many students demonstrate weaknesses in recording information and lack the conceptual agility required to make effective links. A significant number of students find difficulty in interpreting questions accurately, which acts as a serious barrier to their attainment in examinations. Some discontinuities in learning resulting from erratic attendance patterns can also militate against individual students' success. Although ready to follow the instructions of their teachers in lessons, few students demonstrate the confidence required to pursue lines of historical enquiry independently. By the end of Year 11, the majority of students are still dependent on their teachers for their learning.
142. Students arrive at the school with well below average skills in the subject. They are making satisfactory to good progress in lessons, largely owing to the focused teaching of basic skills. The success of these skills initiatives is clearly reflected in the rise in standards attained by younger students. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs, including English as an additional language, make similar rates of progress as their peers. They are well served by the effective support of dedicated teaching assistants and the provision of lessons that are accessible to them. Work is now underway to enhance the performance of the highest-attaining students by improving the provision of extension activities.
143. The quality of teaching, overall, is good. Teachers possess a good level of subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic in their approach and deliver well-structured lessons, in which students are challenged appropriately. Good quality resources are used to stimulate interest and help understanding. Teachers know their students well and good relationships

underpin firm classroom control. Without strong classroom management, behaviour can quickly become unacceptable.

144. The department places a clear focus on skills development in lesson planning. As yet, the subject has provided irregular opportunities to develop ICT skills. This has been due to pressures on the existing school computers and the lack of dedicated workstations in the history teaching rooms. Teachers actively promote the use of different strategies in lessons to develop skills in the use of English. However, homework provides limited opportunities for students to engage in extended writing and comprehension exercises. Overall, the quality of marking is very good. Students are generally offered very good advice as to what they must do to improve their work, although this does not always extend to the grammar and sense of their writing.
145. The leadership of the head of department is very effective. There is a strong commitment to improve pupil achievement, which is reflected in a positive ethos. Clear policies and procedures underpin the drive to raise standards. Appropriate priorities are being set for the future. Assessment and tracking procedures are well developed, although there is some lack of visibility in sharing grade levels and criteria with students. Data is analysed effectively by the subject leader. Very well produced schemes of work are in place. Overall, the quality of departmental documentation is exemplary. Where there is a weakness, is in the management and co-ordination of the team. This is reflected in a lack of consistency in teaching styles and delivery, as well as in record keeping. Communication, and thus the dissemination of good practice, is rendered difficult because all teachers in the team are drawn to other senior responsibilities in the school.
146. Displays in the history area do much to celebrate pupil achievement. The curriculum is enriched by means of a well-conceived programme of visits. Topics of study help towards the development of moral, cultural and social understanding.
147. Standards of attainment have declined since the time of the last inspection. However, there are improvements in the overall quality of teaching and departmental administration.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The lack of curriculum time for the subject in all years is having a serious impact on standards
- The use of assessment data to inform the planning of new work requires further development
- Standards in all years are in need of improvement

Commentary

148. Standards are being affected by the limited amount of time given to the subject in all years. This also prevents students from reflecting on their experiences and their ability to 'learn from' religion. Students in all years do not receive their full entitlement to religious education. Statutory requirements are not met in relation to the requirements of the LEA's agreed syllabus.
149. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average in relation to the requirements of the Hillingdon LEA agreed syllabus. It was not possible to see any written work in Years 10 and 11, nor observe any teaching during the inspection week.

150. Teaching is satisfactory, overall. There is wide variation in the quality of teaching and this is linked to the current lack of specialisation in the subject. Lesson aims were not always shared with students. Teachers make satisfactory use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. The range of teaching styles is rather limited and this restricts the way students are enabled to *learn from* as well as *learn about* religion. This affects the ability of students to maintain their interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts. Resources are used well, but there is an excessive use of written tasks and worksheets. Teachers manage students' behaviour in a satisfactory manner and this contributes to their learning. Extension work and homework are not used effectively to enable students to reflect on the information they have gained in class. Teachers have satisfactory expectations of students and do challenge them to succeed. This means that students do make sufficient progress in relation to what they are capable of achieving.
151. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory and some helpful comments are made in exercise books. The current procedures provide a sound basis for assessing what students know and understand. Marking of students' work is inconsistent and the grading system requires further development. The department does use levels of attainment and does set targets for students. This approach is in the early stages of development.
152. Curriculum leadership is in the process of change. However, the temporary arrangements are satisfactory. The deputy head is currently acting as head of the department. There is good support from other departmental staff. There is a need to extend the departmental development plan to address current priorities that will have an impact on pupil attainment. The systematic monitoring of students' work is established.
153. Since the last inspection, the limited amount of time given to the subject in all years continues to be a cause for concern. No action has been taken to rectify the matter. As a consequence, improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress in electronics and food technology
- Good resources and accommodation create a good environment for learning
- Good relationships between teachers and students has a good impact on learning
- Students show good attitudes to the subject
- There is the need to raise standards further and to strengthen students' ability to apply the full design process, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- Make more effective use ICT to raise the quality and presentation of work
- Increase the examination opportunities for students in Years 10 and 11

Commentary

154. The school has had problems in recruiting and retaining specialist staff in this department. As a result, it has been difficult to provide continuity for some teaching groups and to offer the full range of specialist examination options for students in Years 10 and 11.
155. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well below the national average. Students joining the school in Year 7 have well below average skills in the subject and their achievement, overall, in design and technology by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. Students develop a good range of practical skills in food technology, textiles and resistant materials, which includes work in

electronics. The design process is well used in food technology, where students show each stage of product development. They test and evaluate the products they make and can suggest ways to improve them further. Drawing skills, however, are undeveloped as a result of the limited specialist graphics teaching, which lowers the detail and quality of the presentation of design and development work across all materials areas.

156. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well below average compared with national expectations. This is endorsed by the well below average GCSE results in 2003. Girls achieve better than the boys. Years 10 and 11 students progress satisfactorily with the more open design opportunities for their GCSE coursework. Achievement is satisfactory, overall. In electronics and food, achievement is now good as a result of good teaching and the rapid increase in students' knowledge and understanding of the subject. In food technology, students are now showing improved skills in designing and product development. They show a broader range of development and product evaluation skills. In resistant materials, students develop a good range of craft skills in both the resistant material and electronics courses. However, they miss important stages of the design process and the quality and presentation of their design portfolio work is a weaker part of their coursework. There are also missed opportunities for students to use ICT to raise the quality of their design work because there are insufficient computer resources available to the department to enable larger groups to be accommodated.
157. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, overall. The teaching in food technology is good. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is focused on establishing a good range of basic skills in all material areas. Lessons are well structured and teachers ensure that students' learning is underpinned with appropriate knowledge, which enables them to work through each task successfully. A good range of activities help to keep students' interest and provides the right level of challenge for them to master the practical skills they encounter to a satisfactory level. Although students experience some limited work in computer-aided design, the resources for computer-aided manufacturing is too limited to extend their experience further. In Years 10 and 11, lessons are planned well to provide students with clear guidance for coursework. However, students do not always show evidence of each stage of development in their work. For example, they do not always show evidence of their research and findings and show how they use this knowledge to write a design specification. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and students benefit from the specialist knowledge they provide. Teachers manage the students well and they encourage them to evaluate their own work at various stages of development. They include a good variety of industrial processes and techniques. Overall, students achieve satisfactory results. Although there were good examples of marking and assessment, they are inconsistent across the specialist areas.
158. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department has established good working relationships amongst staff, particularly through a period of staffing difficulties. However, staffing difficulties have restricted the range of material areas that students can choose at GCSE, which means that courses in graphics and textiles cannot be offered. Marking and assessment is underdeveloped and more use could be made of data analysis to target work more precisely to students' individual learning needs, and to evaluate the impact of what is provided in the learning. Although there is monitoring in terms of performance management, opportunities for teachers to observe each other and to share good practice are limited. Satisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection. There is very good technician support, which complements the work of the department well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art

Provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum planning is effective, although the three-dimensional content of the curriculum is a weaker aspect
- Students do not always know what it is that they have to do in order to improve
- The cohesion and breadth of subject knowledge in the teaching team and their commitment to the students
- There is limited ICT provision in art

Commentary

159. By the age of 14, most students produce a standard of work in line with national expectations and over a third more attain higher National Curriculum levels. GCSE results are substantially above the national average. There is, however, slight underachievement by some of the most able students, which brings overall performance into line with the students' averages for all subjects. Attainment seen in mid-Year 10 is satisfactory but students make steadily increasing progress through to GCSE.
160. This achievement is the result of a carefully designed and effective Programme of Study and the hard work of a well-balanced and knowledgeable teaching team. Teaching is mainly good or very good and is most effective where it is challenging and high paced, as in the direct observational drawing of natural forms and complex compositional tasks set in Year 11. Teachers are willing to "go the extra mile" to support the achievement of students, with whom they maintain very good working relationships.
161. Learning is steady and purposeful. Students are trusting, engaged and focused and projects and tasks are thoroughly resolved. Classroom study is underpinned by the routinely good use of sketch-books for recording, collecting and the investigation of artists' work. Effective use of assessment stimulates improvement and students have a very good idea of what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. A Year 8 lesson was concluded with an excellent group assessment in which students evaluated their own work and that of others.
162. The students' work is strong in colour, drawing and relief but fully three-dimensional work is limited. The use of computer technology in art barely meets the National Curriculum requirement but the new digital work now emerging is very promising.
163. The department is well led by a subject leader with a deep understanding of the role of art in a broad and balanced curriculum. Accommodation and materials for two-dimensional art are good but for three-dimensional work and computer-aided art they are very limited. There are very good opportunities to visit galleries, and effective cultural development is embedded in the art curriculum.
164. Since the last report, the art department has established a new team under the continuing subject leader. In Years 7 to 9 good standards have been maintained, and in Years 10 and 11 standards and achievement have improved.

Dance

Provision in dance and dance within expressive arts is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards achieved and the progress made by students of all abilities
- The enthusiasm and interest shown in lessons and in observing rehearsal of others
- The quality of teaching contributing to good learning
- Poor accommodation

Commentary

165. Standards are above average at Year 9 and at Year 11. In Years 7 to 9, students demonstrate growing confidence in learning new skills and applying them to their own pieces. Student-devised choreography is often innovative and creative, and is performed with good attention to movement quality. They remember complex movement routines accurately, with the most able students introducing sensitivity and accurate use of dynamics to vary their interpretation. Students going on to examination courses through both Expressive Arts and GCSE Dance achieve considerable success. They apply what they know to very good effect in devising their own work. They apply learned and well-rehearsed techniques, understand choreographic devices and, in the best examples, move with fluency, musicality and sensitivity. Standards are higher within the dance-specific GCSE course than in the broader expressive arts, where students are required to develop more broadly-based skills, and written skills vary substantially. Writing tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative, with little evidence of students asking the question 'why?'
166. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In individual lessons, in Years 7 to 9, the majority of students focus on tasks, listen carefully and relish the challenge of devising their own work. These students build on what they know, often producing well-structured pieces and very good group work, listening carefully to one another's ideas, rehearsing independently of the teacher, practising and refining their own work. A small number of students, mainly boys, require more teacher support and focus. On examination courses, very good achievement is evident not only within individual lessons but also in the way students build on their skills, knowledge and understanding developed in previous years. The enthusiasm of these students is contagious, they are keen to show their skills, recognising the quality and originality of their own work and that of others.
167. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11 because teaching challenges students to perform at their best. Very good subject knowledge results in confident delivery and high expectations of teachers and interest and enthusiasm from students. Teachers use questioning to good effect, recapping on previous work and in gauging understanding. Lessons are well planned, with sequential development of skills and good use of the limited resources, which helps students understand what they are doing and why. The use of assessment remains an area for further development, in identifying more accurately the standards achieved by students and in setting future targets. Teachers and students cope well with the very poor facilities, which do little to enhance the subject or reflect the enthusiasm of students.
168. Good management and clear leadership and vision for the future have created an effective department. The school is involved extensively in extra-curricular dance and the performance arts through productions, clubs and in local area performances based at local theatre venues, which are very well supported by students.
169. The subject was not identified as a separate area in the previous inspection.

Drama

Drama is taught as a subject in Years 7 to 9 and is part of an expressive arts course in Years 10 to 11.

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and develop a good understanding of the medium and the disciplines required
- Teaching and learning are good
- Accommodation is very poor

Commentary

170. By Year 9 standards are average. Students' achievement is good. Students gain confidence as performers. They understand the process involved in creating a piece for an audience and rehearse well in preparation for a performance. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students, owing to the good support they receive from the teacher and teaching assistant. Talented students make good progress and show ability in all aspects of the work.
171. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and good use is made of the teacher's own skills to aid students' understanding. This was evident in a Year 9 lesson when each pupil prepared a monologue. The teacher demonstrated the way a short script might be enhanced by using different dramatic effects. This resulted in students improving their ability to convey the emotions represented in the piece. Satisfactory procedures are in place for assessing students' work. The accommodation is very poor.

Drama in the expressive arts course

172. By Year 11, standards are average. Students offer suggestions about the way a given stimulus might be used to create a performance. They plan a production, produce a script and identify the way main characters might be developed. They analyse a published script to see how emotions are conveyed to an audience. They understand some key subject vocabulary, although they do not always make reference to this in discussions.
173. Teaching and learning are good. Skilled use is made of questioning and this has a positive impact on learning. Good relationships are established with students and, as a result, they want to do their best. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, students rehearsed a scene, with the teacher taking the role of director. Positive relationships during the rehearsal enabled students to offer their own suggestions for the way the scene was to be portrayed. As a result, students understood the importance of a well-organised rehearsal and improved their own acting abilities. The good provision for school productions provides further opportunities for students to develop their skills.

Music

Music is taught to Years 7, 8 and 9.

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average in Year 9
- Good provision is made for developing students' performing skills in lessons and in extra-curricular activities
- The provision for students to use ICT in lessons is unsatisfactory

Commentary

174. By Year 9, standards are below average. Students in Year 9 create music to illustrate a war poem; some students use basic chords well to convey the atmosphere of the poem but several students' compositions, however, show a limited use of ideas and a lack of fluency in performance. Although students show some knowledge of musical terms, they do not always make reference to these when answering questions. Students enter school with variable musical experiences, but their achievement is satisfactory.
175. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students, owing to the good support they receive from teachers and the teaching assistant. More musically able students progress well and show higher standards of work.
176. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Class management is secure and good provision is made for evaluating students' work. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, students created their own short jingle for a television advertisement. The teacher discussed the effectiveness of the compositions and suggested ways that they might be improved. As a result, students understood the importance of making the jingle easy for the listener to remember. Provision for developing students' literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory. There is no provision for students to use computer programs to devise and refine their compositions.
177. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been staff changes since the last inspection and the head of department is new to the post. However, she has already identified ways to improve students' achievement. Assessment procedures are being developed further, so as to ensure that students are fully aware of their own progress. Over 40 students receive instrumental lessons and the opportunity is provided for students to perform, both in and out of school. The accommodation is satisfactory. The resources, however, are inadequate, because there are no computers in the department.
178. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Although standards have declined by Year 9, no significant difference was seen in the performing ability of boys and girls. The good extra-curricular provision enables students to continue to develop confidence as performers.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The positive behaviour and attitudes of students and good participation in lessons
- The perseverance and commitment of students undertaking examination courses
- Consistent application of planning, performing and evaluating strands of National Curriculum
- Understanding and use of subject terminology

- Assessment and links to target setting
- The lack of adequate facilities and storage

Commentary

179. Standards are average by Year 9 and below average in Year 11. In Years 7 and 8, students demonstrate technical skills appropriately across a range of activities. They send and receive a ball accurately in team games and demonstrate good control and inventiveness in gymnastics. In Year 9, boys are less secure or confident in transferring and building on skills in basketball. In Year 11, the majority have grasped the techniques sufficiently to play games within the core PE programme but those on examination courses find it difficult to talk about, or write down, what they know. Many of these GCSE students have limited abilities across the whole school curriculum, and their lack of literacy skills makes it difficult for them to understand the subject terminology and, therefore, answer questions accurately.
180. Achievement in lessons and progress over time is good throughout, with no significant differences in the achievement of boys, girls or students from different ethnic groups. Both students with special educational needs and the most talented individuals benefit from the opportunities to work with others in groups, learning by doing, observing, commenting on and refining their own work and that of others. Good participation in lessons and positive attitudes are features of lessons, with students showing interest and growing awareness of the broader needs of the subject. Students on GCSE courses work hard to understand the work, showing considerable commitment to their learning. The best achievement occurs when students are engaged in practical tasks.
181. The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory. Teachers focus on the planning, performing and evaluating strands of the National Curriculum, working hard to engage students' thinking to aid understanding. In the best lessons, challenging tasks and skilful questioning based on good subject knowledge and, with a focus on key words, supports learning. Teachers give positive and supportive feedback on work in progress and good relationships give students the confidence to try new skills or express their ideas. However, there is some variability and learning is less secure in lessons where tasks are too easy or when teachers assume understanding. Gauging standards accurately, and predicting targets for the future, are areas for development within the department.
182. Good leadership and management of the subject have resulted in an effective teaching team, working for the benefit of students. A very high proportion of teachers hold additional pastoral roles, which, although of benefit in knowing students well, has an impact on the time given to the subject. The deployment of teachers generally uses expertise appropriately, and there have been recent, effective changes to improve staffing continuity within the curriculum. Poor quality facilities are managed well, but do not create an environment that reflects the positive attitudes and commitment of the staff or students. The lack of an extended lunch break affects attendance in extra-curricular activities. However, despite the disadvantages, the most talented students and teams perform well in local, area and national competitions and there are some outstanding individuals who have gained representative levels.
183. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

184. It was not possible to see any Year 10 students being taught; a representative group of students were interviewed. They were positive about the course, saying they liked the mix of whole-class teaching and individual computer-based learning and that the course teaches them things that will be of direct use to them in the future. However, they also said that this style of teaching did allow some disruptive students too much freedom. They also feel that the installation of Broadband to support the ICT system would speed the system up a lot. Most

said they would probably take the subject in the sixth form – so that the subject is likely to become even more popular now that it is being taught in the main school as a discrete subject.

ASDAN

185. The school makes very effective use of the ASDAN course as an alternative to the academic provision. Essentially, the nature of the course allows students to succeed and this is reflected in the quality of work in students' folders and their evident pride in what they have achieved. The work is relevant because it is work-related and it provides good opportunities to develop basic skills. Half the group progress to silver award from the bronze starting point. The school has been invited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network to participate in a pilot project to examine the equivalence of the silver award to GCSE grades.
186. Overall, students' attitudes are good and they are clearly motivated by the course. Teaching is good. The work is planned well, with clear guidance and support. What the school has managed most effectively is to raise the status of the work and provide effective alternative progression into the sixth form. A number of sixth formers, spoken to informally, who were going on to Higher Education had progressed through the ASDAN route onto the sixth form access course (ASDAN gold) and had taken off from there.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to good learning, overall
- Good relationships between teachers and students create a good climate for learning
- A good range of teaching resources enhances learning well
- Marking assessment and targets are used well to support students to in improving their work
- Ensure students are challenged sufficiently well in lessons
- Ensure work is sufficiently differentiated to meet the learning needs of individual students and structure the learning resources to enable students to use it easily for revision
- Use ICT more effectively to increase the quality and overall presentation of coursework

Commentary

187. Standards of work seen on the GCSE Health and Social Care and the NVQ Early Years Care courses are average compared with national expectations. The first groups to take the examinations will be in the summer of 2004. There is good achievement, overall, compared with the below average knowledge of the subject that students have prior to starting these courses. There is good coverage of new knowledge.
188. In the work seen during the inspection, students cover knowledge of maintaining good health and consider various aspects of personal development, relationships and the work of a wide range of support agencies within the community. They show good research skills and use a wide range of sources to find information before preparing their coursework assignments. Students follow the guidance provided by the teachers well and structure their work closely to match the examination requirements. This enables them to gain marks for each section of the work. However, a significant minority of students is less confident, which prevents them from participating fully in class discussions. All students show a good attitude to their work and benefit well from their work experience placements.

189. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection is good. Lessons are well-structured and planned. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and, as a result, they guide students well to focus on the relevant and most important aspects of the learning. Teachers set clear objectives for lessons and this help students to pace themselves and structure their coursework. In lessons, teachers cover the basic knowledge to good depth and explain the information well. Teachers use a variety of interesting methods to secure and underpin learning. This was seen in a very good health and social care lesson where students were asked to analyse family structures and circumstances. Discussions were based on well-known television soap families, which enabled students to discuss issues in depth without them becoming too personalised. Teachers develop students' skills in literacy and numeracy well, which enable them to interpret national data and to understand terms and key words, so increasing their level of understanding. Although the use of ICT is increasing, it is still underused to improve the quality and presentation of coursework. Teachers are sensitive and supportive of the needs of individual students on the course.
190. Management of the subject is good. The GCSE Health and Social Care and NVQ Early Years courses are now well established. There is strong teamwork amongst the staff and good relationships with students are a strong feature of the department's ethos. Student achievement is good. There is good monitoring of students' work and opportunities for improvement.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and makes a clear contribution to students' achievement and conceptual development
- The monitoring of citizenship is used well to develop the subject further
- Good leadership and management of the subject ensure that students are provided with a rich diet of citizenship education

Commentary

191. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are well below average in relation to what can be expected of students. Given the well below average standards when students enter the school, this represents satisfactory achievement.
192. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average in the work seen and in lessons observed. This represents good achievement. In the GCSE short course in 2003, students achieved 64 per cent A* to C, a good result. Standards continue to rise year by year. Students demonstrate a good understanding of concepts such as rights and responsibilities, justice and fairness, and can relate these to their own and others' experiences.
193. The school is committed to the provision of Citizenship education and sees it as integral to students' personal development. The programme has been developed well and significant steps have already been taken to deliver this aspect of the curriculum. Careful thought and attention has been given to how to deliver this aspect of students' personal development. A small team of skilled teachers ensures that students make good progress, especially in Years 10 and 11. Citizenship education is taught separately alongside religious education and personal and social education. It is not, as yet, fully supported by related themes and topics covered in other subjects. Students have additional opportunities to develop an understanding of responsible citizenship and the democratic process through a range of activities. All students are required to demonstrate their participation in citizenship activities as part of their

GCSE course requirements. Citizenship themes, such as economic and political literacy, have been introduced well and there are plans to integrate additional topics into the curriculum in history, geography and science. These activities provide a good basis to enable students to develop a clear awareness of what it means to be a responsible citizen.

194. The good teaching challenges students to develop their own attitudes to citizenship very well. In the lessons observed, the teachers' knowledge and confidence enable students to develop important citizenship skills. The good use of questions and range of styles enables students to think about their own responses to issues.
195. The good leadership and management of the subject make a significant contribution to students' progress in the area. The teaching of citizenship is very well supported by a comprehensive scheme of work, although not enough is done to ensure that assessment procedures enable students' progress to be recorded accurately. Monitoring of the work of the subject is well established. Citizenship make a valuable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students, both in terms of the curriculum on offer and the teaching styles that encourage students to develop attitudes and values. Good progress is being made in the development of citizenship and this provides a very firm base for further improvement.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002, which is the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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	8	87.5	90	37.5	42.7	36.3	39
Biology	13	53.8	81.6	0	33.2	15.4	33.2
Chemistry	6	66.7	84.8	0	36.9	21.7	35.2
Communication studies	6	100	94.2	16.7	36.1	35	38.5
Economics	14	71.4	86.2	14.3	41.5	23.6	37
English literature	16	81.3	94.4	6.3	37.9	23.1	38.9
History	5	80	91.8	0	37.2	22	37.8
Information technology	30	66.7	78.2	3.3	20.6	20	28.5
Mathematics	7	57.1	74.2	14.3	34.3	18.6	31.3
Other social studies	26	57.7	83.2	7.7	32.5	19.6	33.6
Physics	5	60	82	0	36.2	16	34.3
Sociology	9	33.3	83.7	11.1	33.6	12.2	33.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	96.1	16.7	48.7	80	85.1
Biology	10	100	91.6	40	36.3	78	74.1
Chemistry	12	100	94	16.7	45.9	71.7	81.1
Economics	10	100	96.2	20	45.8	60	83.1
English literature	12	100	98.5	16.7	43.7	68.3	84.3
History	6	100	97.1	0	41	66.7	81.2
Information technology	48	95.8	89.1	29.2	22.4	72.9	64.1
Mathematics	9	100	93.3	33.3	52.2	77.8	84.7
Other social studies	14	100	94.3	42.9	38.9	82.9	77.7
Sociology	8	100	95.4	12.5	39.6	70	79.1

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	48	91.7	87.1	29.2	16.5	65.8	60.1
Science	8	100	90.1	0	9.3	65	58.4
Information technology VQ	6	66.7	84.3	0	24.5	35	64.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

The focus of inspection was English Literature. A lesson in GCSE retakes linked with basic skills was sampled. Teaching and learning were good and the students demonstrated a good understanding of the texts and topics they are studying and exploring.

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are rising and examination results are improving
- Teaching is consistently good in Year 13 because they have good command of the subject and a good understanding of their students' needs
- Students learn very well; they are good at working together in pairs and in groups
- The subject is led and managed well and there is good assessment and monitoring of students' work
- The percentage of students achieving higher grades is lower than the national average

Commentary

196. Standards achieved in 2003 in A2 and AS level entries were close to the national average point scores. The results show a steady improvement and rising upward trend over the last few years, except for a slight dip in 2002. There is no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students, although more females tend to take the course. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds tend to achieve well.
197. The observation of work during the inspection confirms these standards. In a Year 13 lesson observed, both male and female students demonstrated through their confident group presentations that they had carefully researched the feminist viewpoint in their texts *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and that they are developing an increasing understanding of how Charlotte Bronte and Jean Rhys structure their novels, express their feminist views in relation to social, class, sexual and, in the case of the Rhys, racial oppression, through the complexity of characters. They know how different religious, social and cultural attitudes are reflected in language. By learning to assess one another's essays against the A2 marking scheme, they are also developing good self-evaluation skills and a good understanding of the expectations of the syllabus. The students are keen and participate fully in their learning. In Year 12, a mixed ethnic group of mainly female students showed that they are building a sound critical analysis of the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. However, irregular attendance by a significant minority of students hinders the pace of improvement, despite the teachers' best efforts.
198. Teachers use their command of the subject well to support learning, balancing pair and group discussions with appropriate intervention to clarify the complexity and to consolidate and build on previous learning. They have good and friendly relationships with their students, whom they

know well, and plan their lessons to meet their individual needs effectively. They engage them well in discussions, helping them along by building on their interests and experiences, particularly in relation to their choice of assignments and projects. They monitor and evaluate students' work well and guide them on how to improve. Though they make good links with moral and social issues, there is less emphasis placed on spiritual and cultural development, which leaves a gap in students' understanding of historical context and background. However, the teachers enable students' learning experiences to deepen through organised theatre visits and external conferences and AS/A2 study days.

199. Leadership and management of English are good; staff work well as a team and there is a good focus on staff development and on improving standards and resources for the sixth form. There is a good system of monitoring and evaluation; good use of assessment is made and support given to students. Parents' evenings for this group are valuable for informing and involving them in their children's learning. There is a good improvement in improving standards since the last inspection, with better focus on oral skills, Standard English and self- and peer evaluation.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

200. Provision for literacy is good, overall. Most teachers are well aware of the importance of effective communication but it is not consistent across the curriculum. For example, in economics, special attention is paid to writing, discussion and feedback and in the ASDAN provision, information and communication technology is used very well to help students with their presentations. Students are learning to evaluate children's literature very well in some of the vocational courses. There is good provision in drama, English, art, law, business studies, ICT and psychology to help students learn a variety of literacy skills such as key words, use of a range of vocabulary, extended writing, analysing scripts and essays, presentations and research. Work is generally presented well but marking does not always indicate inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Students studying physical education do not use technical language comfortably and find difficulty in putting their own spoken responses into writing. Reading is generally good, and students use the Internet for researching information, but much reliance is placed on selected texts and extracts of information rather than reading widely.

MATHEMATICS

The inspection covered the A2 level and AS level examination courses offered by the school: pure mathematics, mechanics, and statistics modules, as well as provision for students resitting GCSE mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in A2 mathematics courses have improved. Students completing the course now reach at least average standards
- Standards in AS mathematics courses are too low and the drop-out rate is high
- Teaching is good and seeks to develop students' mathematical understanding. Relationships between teachers and students are very good
- Marking and informal assessment are satisfactory, but more could be done to identify underachievement early in AS level courses

Commentary

201. Advanced level mathematics results have been below national expectations. However, of the four students completing the course in 2003, two gained A grades. There is a high take up of

advanced supplementary mathematics courses but the drop-out rate is also high, partly

because too many students begin the course from too low a base. In 2003, less than half of the group obtained a pass grade and fewer than a quarter of students went on to complete the A2 course successfully.

202. The standards of work seen in lessons and in the five current students' records in Year 13 indicate good progress for those following A2 level courses. However, these successful students report their difficulties in the transition from GCSE mathematics to AS level work without the aid of a bridging course. In discussion, both AS and A2 groups noted the challenges in building on Year 11 work that was only partially understood, particularly higher order manipulative algebra skills. Students honestly admit to limited independent study skills at the start of courses. There is no distinct pattern of differences in attainment in the three areas of mathematics studied. However, some students find pure mathematics modules particularly challenging in the initial stages of the course.
203. Post-16 students resitting GCSE mathematics benefit from three lessons per week. However, some of these students experience three different teachers over this period. This does little to support their motivation, so that attendance for classes is erratic. The department valiantly tries to track the students' progress through homework and module tests but they are hindered by the timetabling. GCSE results for those students who resat mathematics in 2003 indicate that approximately half the students raised their grades by at least one level. However, only twenty per cent of the group achieved a grade C. Progress records so far, for the group observed, shows the majority of the students to be achieving satisfactorily with improved results in module tests. A few students, however, had either withdrawn or regressed significantly.
204. The teaching sampled was good. All teachers have a very good command of mathematics and understand clearly the requirements of the examination specifications. The best lessons give careful thought to the development of the students' thinking skills, as, for example, in a mechanics lesson where practical work supported theoretical questions on centres of mass. When ICT resources are available teachers use this very well to model work and focus the students' attention – as in the GCSE resit lesson on directed numbers. Students report significant help and support from their teachers and working relationships are very good.
205. The mathematics department's provision for post-16 mathematics is well-managed. The department makes good use of the school's review and target-setting process to track the students' progress. However, more could be done to identify underachievement earlier in the AS modules. The previous inspection gave little prominence in the report to post-16 mathematics. However, there is greater consistency in the A2 mathematics results than those previously reported and teaching is consistently good. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory but there is further to go in remedying the underachievement of some students, and in enriching the mathematics resources available to the students to support their wider reading on aspects of mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

206. Post-16 provision for the key skill of application of number rests within specific curriculum areas. However, although most students have sufficient skills to support work in A2 courses, students studying AS physics courses have real difficulty in using higher order manipulative algebra skills. This hinders their understanding of the work. Some students also have difficulties with numeracy in chemistry.

SCIENCE

207. The work of AS and A2 Biology and Chemistry were inspected and work in physics sampled.
208. All four **physics** students passed A level in 2003 and almost all completed the AS course, with three students achieving high grades. These three have continued to study A level and assessments show that they are likely to pass the examination with either an A or B grade. Standards are variable in the current Year 12 because of shortcomings in numeracy. Year 13 enjoyed grappling with the complexities of time dilation because the quality of teaching that stemmed from expert knowledge of relativity, constantly challenged them. Year 12 students need to sharpen up their skills of observation and application for advanced level work.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of their teacher's very good knowledge and drive to share it with them
- Students' good attitudes towards tackling work enriches their learning but more practice in summarising the key concepts of lessons is needed to improve its quality
- Opportunities for rigorous challenge, application and argument need widening through increased imaginative involvement of students throughout lessons

Commentary

209. A level results in 2003 were well below average because just one student achieved grade B, but all twelve passed the examination. Results in 2002 were better because four achieved the top-most grades and all ten students passed. In 2003, AS results improved, five students achieved A or B grades and almost all completed the course.
210. Standards of current students are broadly average. In Year 13, most are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. Assessments, so far, show that all are likely to pass the examination. Students' good attitudes help their progress. From conducting trial tests, everyone made good progress in identifying variables warranting further exploration when investigating lipid digestion. They knew what needed to be tested, and why, because they attended well to their teacher's knowledgeable presentation. When a point was not understood, they asked questions confidently which were deftly dealt with. More practice is needed in summarising key issues of a lesson concisely to help the learning process.
211. Standards in Year 12 are average and achievement is satisfactory as students move steadily on from GCSE work into new areas. They made good progress in learning more about how carbon dioxide is transported and released in the body, although aspects of biochemistry baffled many. There is scope for more regular challenge of assumptions to help students clarify explanations and unravel new ideas confronting them, like the influence pH has upon the transport of oxygen and the 'knock-on' effect this has upon the production of carbon dioxide.
212. Books show that the very best work makes hypotheses explicit, conclusions well-structured and consistent with results and good, critical evaluations. Generally, there is good, accurate use of statistics in work investigating the distribution of freshwater shrimps in a stretch of water. On the other hand, several students have difficulty clearly justifying improvements to experimental procedures. Earlier training in investigative methodology would considerably help to raise these standards.

213. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. There is close rapport between the teacher and students, which helps them to tackle difficult work and make good progress. A striking feature is the teacher's strong subject expertise. It was used well in widening knowledge about mammalian physiology through a clear demonstration of the purpose of bile on fat digestion. The teacher well knows the next steps students need to take to advance their learning. To improve its quality even more, they now need to be imaginatively involved throughout lessons so that they can more effectively 'handle' new ideas.
214. Good teaching and learning results from work in biology being well co-ordinated. One teacher ably undertakes all the teaching and administration of the subject because of acute staffing problems. Good use is made of assessment information to check the progress of individual students and set them targets. There is now a need to focus upon A-B grades when judging standards.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective planning and questioning clearly stems from teachers' expertise in chemistry
- Development of students' skills of planning and analysis is good but those necessary for argument and critical evaluation are underdeveloped
- Students' generous teamwork in tackling complex work enriches their learning, although knowledge of revision technique is limited
- The rate of progress is more noteworthy in Year 13 than in Year 12 because they build better on what they have already achieved and thrust forward to improve their standards

Commentary

215. At A level, in 2003, two students achieved A or B grades out of a small group of five. Although results were below average at A or B grades the previous year, all passed. More students chose to study chemistry in 2003 than in the previous year. Five students did not complete the course but three of the remainder achieved high grades.
216. Current standards in Year 13 are broadly average. Achievement of the few students who gained A* at GCSE is particularly noteworthy in its consistency as they continue to improve performance. Assessments so far show that, in terms of predictions based upon their work and AS results, all are likely to pass the examination. Where grades have dipped, it is mainly because of problems with numeracy. Students made very good progress in learning about the iodination of propanone because of their teacher's pointed questions about observations. In addition, the very good teamwork and humour of the students sharply stimulated their learning as they measured the rate of the reaction and deduced its nature.
217. Current standards in Year 12 are, overall, below average due to a core of underachievement shown in test results. Homework marks have been relatively good because research skills are developing well, but knowing how to plan learning is limited. Although practical skills were less sophisticated than expected, students safely prepared ethene by dehydrating ethanol to make satisfactory progress in a lesson about alkenes.
218. Work is usually well organised and there are good opportunities for students to learn scientific method. Although, currently, planning and analytical skills are underdeveloped in certain Year 12 work, there is a noticeable improvement of these skills in Year 13. Bibliographies indicate good use of a range of secondary sources by high-attaining students, who also are able to justify their selection of apparatus for investigations well. However, several other students have difficulty in clearly justifying conclusions. There is scope for developing skills of argument.

219. Teaching is good, overall, so students have good opportunities to achieve well. Very good knowledge about chemistry is used well in perceptive questioning. Close rapport between the teacher and students considerably helped Year 13 to learn in a team setting, where they confidently relied upon one another for key results. Their teacher had especially planned the teams to make the best use of time. Effective planning of learning experiences results in good achievement for many, although, generally, lessons too rarely have an interesting ending to consolidate learning in an imaginative way.
220. Chemistry is well co-ordinated and managed. A clear commitment to raising standards exists. The subject is benefiting substantially from analysis of performance undertaken by the science department. The progress of individual students is now tracked keenly so swift action can be taken to minimise underachievement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The GNVQ course was sampled and the AVCE course inspected.

The **GNVQ Intermediate IT** course provides a valuable qualification for students who have not studied IT at GCSE, and is used well by some as a bridge to the AVCE course. Teaching was satisfactory in lesson seen, but the continuity of the course is disrupted by the unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality of a high proportion of the group.

AVCE

Provision in IT is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good pathways through the subject from the Access course through GNVQ to AVCE is helping students to achieve well
- Very good use of assessment to raise standards
- Good planning for and delivery of the AVCE course
- Very good relationships between staff and students that promote a high level of trust and commitment to the work
- Unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality in the GNVQ intermediate course

Commentary

221. Overall standards in the AVCE course are good. Results in 2003 were above average in terms of passes, but with a low proportion of students attaining higher grades. Results in the Year 12 modules were better, with good retention into Year 13, and a higher proportion of students gaining A or B grades. This improvement is borne out in the work seen during the inspection, where Year 13 students designing web sites have meticulously carried out all of the requirements of the course so far and are able to test, evaluate and redesign their work. Year 12 students seen in class have designed competent systems to solve problems that they identified individually. Both year groups have made good progress in their understanding, and so their achievement is good. Students coming to the Year 13 course through the school's Access route and GNVQ intermediate course show very good achievement.
222. Teaching is very good, with particular strengths in assessment and in the structure that helps students to plan so that project work is well thought through and meets all of the course criteria. This is very well reinforced by the teachers' careful feedback, showing students how they can raise their standards. Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and of the course gives students a very high level of confidence in their judgements. Students therefore work hard, think carefully and make independent decisions. Teachers encourage them to maintain a good balance between the technical and analytical aspects of the course.

223. Leadership is good, with the result that the team of sixth form teachers sharing groups work together seamlessly to improve the quality and continuity of students' learning. There is a high level of consistency that reinforces good learning. Students have access at most times to computers for their personal work, and are given good assistance by technical support staff to improve relevant aspects of their work. The AVCE course has been well selected to meet students' learning needs.
224. Improvement since the last inspection is good in that courses only just started at that point have now been adjusted to meet more clearly the needs of the students, and are now well established.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

225. The use of ICT is variable across the curriculum. Sixth form students make effective use of the Internet for research and independent learning. The independent use of ICT is good.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and teamwork by the staff, helping students to succeed
- Very good relationships between the students and with staff
- The recruitment and retention of students for the sixth form is limited

Commentary

226. No candidates entered for GCE Advanced level in 2002. Five students entered in 2003, four of whom gained a pass. During this year there are students for A/S but no candidates in Year 13. The standard of work seen is in line with national expectations, based on the prior attainment of students on the course. They work independently, drawing up plans for a cost-benefit analysis of coastal development projects for Lyme Regis beach. Role-play of project manager, engineer, geologist, public relations officer and press officer enables the students to appreciate the complexity of resolving conflicts and the impact of vested interest in a real-life situation. The students achieve well through a determined effort to succeed.
227. The quality of teaching is good. Work is assessed regularly and suggestions for improvements made. They receive clear guidelines on the level of their work and what needs to be done to reach a higher grade. Teachers place emphasis on the development of thinking skills and independent learning. For example, in their lesson on coastal development the students used a variety of strategies to decide roles and responsibilities. They support one another by presenting different points of view while showing respect for the opinions of others. The tutorial system helps the students in the transition from GCSE to A/S level work. Good use is made of video clips to illustrate features and supplement text material.
228. Leadership is good, with a clear vision for development, but staff workload puts a strain on the amount of time available. Residential fieldwork to Flatford Mill enhances the curriculum and the students make a good display in the classroom of the range of work covered there. The examination board scheme of work has been adapted to suit the needs of the students and responsibility for modules delegated to individual staff. Resources, including new textbooks, have been updated and visits to conferences on geography have been organised to broaden the experience of the students. Under new leadership steps are being taken to improve the recruitment and retention of students for geography at GCSE and GCE advanced level. The

importance of fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 and promoting the career potential of the subject have been recognised as contributory factors.

History

The quality of provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment
- Leadership of the subject is very good
- Students are slow to assume responsibility for their own learning
- Students do not read widely enough

Commentary

229. Since the last inspection, A level results have fluctuated reflecting the ability range of the intake. In 2002, the latest year for which we have national comparisons, all students passed but the results, overall, were well below average. In 2003, there was a 100 per cent pass rate and one student gained an A grade, which represented an improvement on 2002. Of the 11 students entered for AS level in 2003, two failed to obtain a grade. There are currently five students in Year 13 who have continued on the course.
230. In the work seen, standards are in line with the national average. Students are making good progress in terms of their prior attainment. Encouraged by their teachers, they are learning to think creatively and to consider different historical approaches and interpretations. By evaluating a wide range of evidence, they heighten their appreciation of historical causation and the issues surrounding historical controversies. However, written work does not yet demonstrate the ability of all Year 12 students to challenge the assumptions implied in a question, or to select and use knowledge relevantly and effectively. Unless cajoled, weaker students tend to be passive learners. They lack confidence in developing their ideas in class discussions. By Year 13, students are adopting a more critical approach. At the top of the range, they produce convincing arguments and reach coherent conclusions.
231. The overall quality of teaching in history is good. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and base their lessons on good quality resource materials. However, there is some lack of coherence in teaching style. Where teaching is most successful, lessons are well planned and carefully structured to motivate and inform. Students are challenged to use their reflective and intellectual skills and are encouraged in discussion. Where teaching is more didactic and reliant on student note-taking, there is less engagement and consequently learning is less secure.
232. Teachers recognise that marking should be regular and constructive. Diagnostic feedback reaches a very high quality and provides students with detailed indicators for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their work. The department scrutinises performance data, but there is scope for the further analysis of value-added information. The stock of school library books for extended reading in history is good. However, students do not maximise the opportunities they are given to read widely or in depth. This reflects their reluctance to accept responsibility for their own learning. Students have access to ICT for the purposes of research, which they use well.
233. Leadership of the subject is very good and reflects a firm commitment to raising standards. The head of department actively promotes enthusiasm for the subject and a culture of high expectations. Relationships between students and teachers are positive and students feel that their teachers are accessible. However, the recent long-term illness of one Year 12 teacher has meant that staffing has been seriously eroded at this level.

234. Overall, good progress has been made since the time of the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art

Provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good use of sketch-books and journals for art history and contextual studies
- The effectiveness and range of assessment activities
- The depth of subject knowledge and intellectual challenge presented by the teaching team and their commitment to the students
- Accommodation for sixth form students is far from ideal
- The poor provision of ICT for sixth form students in art

Commentary

235. Attainment at AS level is good and at A2 level 5 out of 6 students attained B or C grades. This small sample is good by national standards and has been achieved despite some constraints. Very good teaching in the sixth form fosters intellectual and aesthetic curiosity by stimulating vigorous and productive discussion between students and staff. Colour is used in a vibrant and mature way. Teachers work hard to support the achievement of students.

236. Very effective use of assessment stimulates improvement and students are invariably able to independently identify ways to develop their work. Sixth form accommodation in art is far from ideal in that students are unable to leave and return to work in progress or display larger pieces. No sixth form work is on display in the art area. ICT resources are poor for art in the sixth form.

Performance studies

The provision in performance studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very positive attitudes of students who give generously of their time to the subject.
- Students achieve good standards
- The students' capacity to work independently is good although their skills of critical evaluation require development
- The poor quality of facilities limit aspects of the learning

Commentary

237. Standards are above average in the dance aspect of the multi-disciplinary course. Students display good knowledge of the subject; for example, in a discussion of the influences of different choreographic styles, they compared and contrasted the works of Matthew Bourne and Siobhan Davies on the post-modernist dance genre. Practical work shows very good attention to movement quality, using the contrasts of motion, stillness and dynamics to enhance their own work. Written work tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative; however, lack of vocabulary is more apparent than lack of understanding.

238. Achievement is very good. The group have varied abilities but there is no apparent difference in the quality of their contributions to lessons. Progress is evident; students listen carefully to each idea and provide comment or suggestions for improvement based on thorough subject

knowledge. Group work is very good; they trust one another's judgements in discussion and in practical work. Students benefit from working independently of the teacher, developing their own work.

239. Teaching and learning are very good. Students learn quickly and thoroughly because teachers have detailed subject knowledge, use focused questioning to gauge understanding, and use excellent demonstrations to illustrate points. Teachers use their own experiences within the world of dance to very good effect. Students are encouraged to develop their technical skills, both within and outside the curriculum, resulting in some dynamic and exciting rehearsals of work in progress and performance pieces, taking place at different times of the day. Students are confident and positive about their work because of very good relationships and the respect they have for their teachers.
240. By Year 13, standards in the drama elements of the course match course-related expectations. Students understand the performance process. They show an ability to construct a performance piece, to refine their ideas and to rehearse in order to produce an effective performance. They improvise, explore the development of dialogue and characters and use other techniques when devising the performance. They make satisfactory reference to historical, cultural and contemporary theatre practices in their written work. Students achieve well. Very good relationships between students and the teacher ensure that ideas are shared and that students make good progress in acquiring performance skills.
241. Teaching and learning are good. The teacher makes effective use of her own skills to extend students' understanding. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson, when students rehearsed a scene from Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Owing to good teacher intervention, students realised the way a character might be developed and the implications presented by the script. Good provision is made for the development of the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. These include using ICT for independent research, planning for productions and writing scripts and programme notes.
242. Limited access to technical resources and poor accommodation and facilities are managed well.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The interest and commitment shown by students, which helps them to make good progress
- Many students come to the subject with limited background knowledge of the subject or related areas so that they have limited knowledge of or confidence in using technical terminology
- Students' involvement with younger students
- Good lesson organisation and clear explanations help students' understanding but teaching strategies do not always use time to best effect

Commentary

243. Many students enter A level courses with very limited background knowledge of the subject, through GCSE or from related areas such as science. Standards are below average and students struggle to understand basic concepts before they can move on to more detailed study. Debate and discussion are limited by lack of subject vocabulary and broad subject knowledge gained through wider reading. Despite these factors, growing numbers are taking on the courses and many students gain success appropriate to their abilities, indicating good progress.

244. Good achievement, overall, reflects the interest and commitment of students. They work hard, listen carefully and focus on tasks. They are conscientious in completing homework tasks within each of the subject strands but need to use their knowledge more broadly, drawing from all relevant strands to answer tasks more comprehensively.
245. Teaching is satisfactory. Good lesson organisation and clear explanations helps students' understanding. Teachers generally use the subject language well and encourage students to use the correct vocabulary in general discussion. However, teaching strategies do not always use time to best effect or encourage skills such as note-taking or problem-solving by students. Good relationships are apparent and contribute to growing confidence.
246. There is no provision for recreational physical education or extra-curricular activities in the sixth form. Opportunities are available for Year 12 students within the enrichment programme and a small number gain from use of good quality facilities off the school site. On site, individuals help with younger students, within both curricular and extra-curricular time, offering good support for the teachers and learning more about different roles and responsibilities within the subject.

BUSINESS

247. Business education was sampled in depth in Years 12 and 13.
248. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well. The key elements of clear guidance, individual support and an insistence that students produce their best work is leading to rising standards in an already successful subject area.
249. The students who take the Intermediate course come from across the academic spectrum – including some coming from the ASDAN course. Most come directly from their GCSE studies, but some come to the course after undertaking AS level courses. All are encouraged to achieve their best through individualised teaching, while at the same time being expected to keep up to date and produce all the work that is expected. Students who do not do this are encouraged to leave. After the course, a few students move directly to employment or to take up modern apprenticeships, others move to vocational courses in Further Education, while the largest group move on to the A level course in Year 13 at school. It is a positive feature of the course that the students co-operate together and support each other well, whatever their academic ability, often working in pairs or small groups in a productive way.
250. The extent to which the school is successful in breaking down the vocational/academic divide is well illustrated by the Year 13 students. They all enjoy this vocational course and all those who were spoken to all said they hope to move into a wide range of degree courses in Higher Education next year. This group show a confidence and maturity that comes from having a clear grasp of their work, which they are able to discuss in depth.
251. Student progress is monitored closely through regular marking of folders, while standards are maintained through a year on year scrutiny of student achievement and through the moderation of coursework, which is integral to the assessment process. During the inspection, there was the opportunity to observe students undertaking individual research as part of their coursework and to see one group presenting their work on marketing strategies to their peers. In all these lessons, the teachers maintained a light touch approach – always available to provide individual support, prompting and advising as necessary, while never directing the nature of the individual research being undertaken via the Internet. Examples of the worksheets produced give very clear guidance on producing effective coursework, and in providing a checklist on what should be achieved in order to meet the requirements and to gain marks when the work is moderated. The outcome is that learning is very effective and there is a real buzz of positive activity in the lessons. There is a clear empathy between teachers and students, and a mutual respect that creates an environment in which students clearly enjoy their work and wish to succeed.

252. Three teachers undertake teaching of Business Studies in the sixth form, two of whom are experienced, while the third is a recent graduate currently in the school on a supply basis with only a week's experience of the course. Despite the staffing difficulties all the teachers show a detailed knowledge of the requirements of the course and are effective in supporting and encouraging the students.
253. The resources available within the subject area are satisfactory. A variety of teaching strategies are used – didactic methods, as appropriate, but also using video, student presentations, worksheets and, in particular, individual learning using the banks of computers in the two specialist rooms used for the course. Although teaching and learning are both good, both aspects are hampered by the poor accommodation.

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		4
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	5	4
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		4
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	3	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		4
Accommodation and resources	5	6
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	3	2

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