

INSPECTION REPORT

WIRRAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Bebington

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105098

Headteacher: Mrs Elaine Cogan

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 December 2003

Inspection number: 259164

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll;	1056

School address:	Heath Road Bebington
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Gillard

Date of previous inspection:	23 February 1998
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Wirral Girls Grammar School is an 11-18 selective school with specialist language college status. There are 776 pupils in the main school and 290 students in the sixth form. This makes the school about the same size as most other schools with sixth forms. Pupils and students are drawn from a very wide area. The school provides for pupils towards the upper end of the attainment range. However, the attainment of a significant proportion of pupils on entry to the school is closer to average rather than above. Because of this the attainment range of pupils entering the school is wider than would be found in most other selective schools. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and with statements are well below average. Pupils with the highest levels of need have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. About four per cent of pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 12 different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school and so there is no significantly large sub-group. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. At the time of the inspection the school was experiencing serious and ongoing disruption to its daily life because of the failure of a national contractor to complete rebuilding work on time.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3390	Ken Thomas	Lead inspector	
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32780	Paul Craine	Team inspector	Geography Geography (sixth form)
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages French (sixth form) German (sixth form)
20055	Sheila Entwistle	Team inspector	Special educational needs
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	English (sixth form) Theatre studies (sixth form)
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education Religious education (sixth form)
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Art Art (sixth form)
20619	Jennifer Hazlewood	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies (sixth form)
22906	Barry Hodgson	Team inspector	Physical education (sixth form)
8183	Gillian Keevil	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History History (sixth form) Sociology (sixth form)
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music
24894	Clive Petts	Team inspector	Design and technology Design and technology (sixth form)
12844	Michael Saunders	Team inspector	English as an additional language English

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a lively, friendly and **very effective school** with some excellent features. The school provides a very good quality of education for all pupils. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, with very good support from other key staff, ensures that pupils from all groups achieve very well. Management is very good. Standards in National Curriculum tests and external examinations are very high. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher's untiring spirit, determination and sense of purpose have secured a firm commitment to continued improvement.
- Standards are very high and achievement is very good because teaching effectively challenges and extends pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes and behaviour make a significant contribution to the calm but purposeful ethos of the school.
- The school has forged very effective partnerships with its parents and the community, which contribute to its success.
- Pupils derive great benefit from the school's excellent provision for modern foreign languages and the outstanding range of enrichment activities.
- Procedures for identifying and making provision for gifted and talented pupils, and the few with special educational needs, are exemplary.
- Because of serious delays in the completion of the rebuilding programme the quality of the accommodation is poor.
- The amount of curriculum time allocated to religious education does not allow full coverage of the Agreed Syllabus and the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of corporate worship is not met.

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have been maintained at a very high level and achievement is very good. There is now more very good and excellent teaching. In addition the school has achieved specialist language college status and the gold Sportsmark awards. All of the key issues identified in the last report have been tackled successfully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9. For Year 13, 2002 is the latest year for which national comparisons are available, but reference is made below to results in 2003.*

Standards are very high and achievement is **very good**. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are very high at the end of Year 9. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also very high. GCSE examination results have been maintained within the highest five per cent nationally since the last inspection. In 2003, the GCSE results were significantly above average in all subjects. External analyses of performance show that in relation to their prior attainment pupils performed better than predicted in all subjects. Sixth form students also achieve very well. Standards in GCE A-level examinations in 2003 were consistent with those obtained in 2002, when they were in

the highest five per cent nationally. External analyses of performance show that, taken as a whole, students achieved about a grade above that predicted from their GCSE grades. Pupils' and students attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Exclusion is not an issue at this school. Pupils' personal development, including their **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent**. Pupils are in regular attendance and punctuality is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Teaching and learning are **good** in Years 7 to 9 and **very good** in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Examples of excellence in teaching were seen in all years. The quality of the curriculum is very good in both the main school and the sixth form. The school has made outstanding provision to enrich pupils' learning outside lessons. Pupils are provided with excellent support and guidance. Parents are highly committed and involved in their children's education. Excellent links with other schools, higher education and the community enhance provision. The only weaknesses relate to the accommodation, the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, and in the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The high quality of leadership provided by the headteacher, with very good support from other senior managers, is ensuring that educational standards and the morale of staff and pupils remain high at a time of severe disruption to the daily life of the school. The school makes very good use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is very good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the school. They express no major concerns and are particularly pleased with the quality of teaching and management of the school. Pupils are equally positive, although the questionnaire responses indicated some disquiet about bullying and behaviour. Inspectors agree with the parents' and pupils' positive views and found no evidence to support pupils' concerns. Indeed, during discussions pupils expressed surprise at some of the findings of the questionnaire.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue to press forcefully for the completion of the rebuilding contract.

and to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that pupils in Years 10 and 11 and sixth form students receive their full entitlement to religious education.
- Provide a daily act of corporate worship.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a welcoming, active and **very effective sixth form**. Strong and sensitive leadership and management and very good teaching ensure that students' achievement is very good and that standards are very high. Students' excellent attitudes make a significant contribution to the dynamic and positive ethos of the sixth form. The sixth form is very cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Excellent relationships amongst students and staff promote an ethos which values service to others as well as the achievement of high academic standards.
- Teaching is characterised by outstanding subject knowledge that is used very effectively to inspire and challenge students' intellectual growth.
- Students' attitudes are excellent. They are very welcoming to newcomers and provide excellent role models for younger pupils.
- The head of sixth form and his very effective team of tutors provide students with excellent support and guidance.
- An outstanding range of enrichment activities extends the opportunities open to students.
- The school does not comply with statutory requirements with regard to the provision of religious education and the daily act of collective worship.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<p>Very good in English language. Results at A-level are consistently well above average because very good teaching challenges students to reach very high academic standards.</p> <p>Very good in English literature. Results at A-level are well above average. Very good teaching ensures that students achieve very well.</p> <p>Excellent in French and German. Specialist language college status has provided the resources for very good and sometimes excellent teaching to raise standards significantly. Students achieve very well.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Very good in mathematics. Results at A-level are well above average because rigorous and challenging teaching ensures that students achieve high standards.</p>
Science	<p>Very good in biology. Examination results are well above average. Teaching is often very good and, as a result, achievement is very good.</p>
Humanities	<p>Very good in religious studies. Teaching and learning are very good. Standards are above average in the work seen.</p> <p>Good in geography. Teaching and learning are good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good.</p> <p>Very good in history. Examination results are consistently above average. Students become active and independent learners because of very good teaching.</p> <p>Good in sociology. Examinations results have risen over recent years particularly for students attaining higher grades. Well-structured teaching encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<p>Very good in design and technology. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. A committed team of teachers with secure subject command promotes good achievement.</p>

Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well. Students are creative, self-confident and enthusiastic about the subject.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good in sports studies. Very good and challenging teaching and students' very positive attitudes together ensure good progress.
Business	Good in business studies. Teaching and learning are good. Examination results are consistently above average.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive excellent advice, support and guidance to enable them to pursue their chosen higher education and career routes. The high quality of the support they receive, together with students' determination and motivation, contributes to the very good progress students make in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are **very good**. The head of the sixth form leads a strong team of tutors who are becoming more central to the monitoring and support of students' academic progress and personal development. The head girl, prefects and other representatives take a very active role in running the sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form. They recognise and value the very good quality of teaching and the commitment of their teachers, both within and outside the classroom. Several areas of concern surfaced in the pre-inspection questionnaire. One of these was about having an adult in the school to whom they could turn if they had personal problems, and others were related to the quality of advice about courses in the sixth form and after they leave. Inspectors spoke with many students and there was general agreement that these criticisms are not valid and arose largely from ambiguity in the questions. They praise the care and support their teachers give them, and also feel that advice about sixth form courses, higher education and employment is excellent and supported by an outstanding careers library.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

The school has maintained very high standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations since the last inspection. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, and the sixth form. Standards, from work seen during the inspection, are well above expected levels.

- Outstanding performance in external examinations enables the vast majority of pupils and students to achieve their goals.
- Excellent provision for pupils with special educational needs, including gifted and talented pupils, ensures that all groups of pupils achieve equally well.
- Assessment information is used effectively to identify where pupils might be falling behind so that action can be taken rapidly.
- The A-level results in 2002 were very high in comparison with the national average and these high standards have been maintained in 2003.
- As a consequence of very good teaching and their own excellent attitudes to their studies, sixth form students achieve very well.

Commentary

1. Standards of attainment on entry to the school cover a wider range than is found in most selective schools. For example, the attainment levels in English, mathematics and science of about 25 per cent of the pupils who entered the school in Year 7 in 2003 were average rather than above. Pupils achieve well in the lower years and very well in the upper years where there is a higher proportion of good and better teaching that inspires pupils to do well. Pupils show a high level of commitment to their studies. They attend regularly and are given carefully focused support and guidance. Increasingly effective use is being made of assessment information to track pupils' performance and identify pupils in need of additional support. These analyses are used particularly well to plan individual intervention, whether this is for gifted and talented pupils who may need additional challenges in their work, or for those who may be experiencing difficulties and in need of extra support.
2. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 pupils rose at a faster rate than results nationally over the five-year period from 1999 to 2003. Results overall and in each of the core subjects were in the highest five per cent in comparison with schools nationally. In comparison with other grammar schools results were below average. However, because of the attainment range of pupils on entry to the school, this is not a fair comparison or accurate reflection of pupils' performance. The school achieved the challenging targets set for 2003 and the overwhelming majority of pupils made at least good progress from when they entered in Year 7. Almost all pupils exceed national expectations for their age and a significant proportion achieved the very high Level 8. There is no validity to any comparison of performance by ethnicity as there are so few pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds in each year group. Nevertheless, the achievement of these few pupils is comparable to that of their peers.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	41.8 (41.2)	33.3 (34.8)
Mathematics	43.9 (43.7)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	42.1 (41.1)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 155 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. The trend in GCSE results has kept pace with results nationally as the school maintains very high standards. The 2003 results were very high in comparison with all schools and average in comparison with other grammar schools. Again the broader attainment range of pupils on entry makes the comparison with similar schools an invalid indicator of the school's relative performance. In 2003, as in all years since the last inspection, almost all pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades, with almost a half of grades being the highest A* and A. These results met the school's challenging targets both for the proportion of pupils who achieved five or more A* to C grades and the average points score. As at the end of Year 9, the achievement of ethnic minority pupils is comparable to that of other pupils. Results in English language, mathematics and science, as in all other subjects, were significantly above average in 2003.

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	97 (99)	58 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	63.0	36.9

There were 152 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Work seen during the inspection confirms the very high standards evidenced in the test and examination results. Standards are high in relation to the expected levels and pupils' achievement is very good. Underpinning the very good progress pupils are making are very high standards of literacy and numeracy and the effective application and extension of these skills in all subjects. The school is successful in its aim that all should benefit from the opportunities that it provides. The school carefully analyses progress against prior attainment and takes steps successfully to tackle any patterns emerging in each year group. The achievement of the very few pupils with special educational needs is comparable to that of their peers because procedures for identifying and supporting them are very effective. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve as well as others in their classes. Assessment information shows that many are amongst the highest achieving pupils in the school. The school also makes excellent provision for gifted and talented pupils. These pupils achieve very well because of careful lesson planning that takes account of their learning needs and the many other achievement opportunities provided through enrichment activities. As a result, there are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.6	95.9
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	55.7	42.2
Average point score per student	369.6 (310.2)	272.7

There were 121 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points

5. Almost all students continue from Year 11 into the sixth form. As a result the attainment range of the sixth form intake, which includes a number of students with comparatively modest GCSE results, is wider than in many selective schools with sixth forms. Nevertheless, most students enter the sixth form having gained high standards in their GCSE examinations. Their commitment and hard work, together with teachers' high expectations and very challenging teaching, ensure that these high standards are not only maintained but also exceeded. Results

in the 2002 A-level examinations were very high and in the highest five per cent of schools nationally. The 2003 results are similar to those obtained in 2002. Virtually all students obtained pass grades in all of their subjects and about a half of all passes were at the highest grades. Value-added measures show that, on average, students gained about one grade higher than the results predicted by their performance at GCSE. Results in AS level examinations are high enough to enable students to continue to Year 13 A-level studies with confidence.

6. Standards seen in the fourteen subjects inspected in depth during the inspection are above or well above course expectations in all subjects. In most subjects the value added by the school to students' achievement is very good, but analyses of students' performance over the last three years show that they tend to do slightly less well in geography, religious education and theatre studies than in other subjects. Students' study skills are very good. They undertake independent research competently and have very good language and literacy skills. Their written work is accurate, fluent and well presented. Students make very effective use of their very good mathematical skills and good computing skills across the curriculum. Very good teaching and the very effective use of assessment and monitoring procedures are helping to maintain and further improve standards.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent throughout the school. The number of exclusions is very low for a school of this size. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. Pupils' attendance is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Pupils' punctuality is good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is outstanding; they are exceptionally conscientious and committed to their studies.
- Relationships between pupils and with adults are excellent; this helps to create a calm and supportive environment that is very conducive to learning.
- Pupils play a full and active part in school life; they take their responsibilities seriously and make a significant contribution to the running of the school.
- Sixth form students enjoy this stage of their education. They are very well motivated and willing to work hard to achieve success.
- Students' attendance is very good and lessons begin punctually despite the many problems presented by the building work.
- Sixth form students are keen to take responsibility and they make a highly effective contribution to the life of the school.

Commentary

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.2	School data	0.0
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

7. The school enjoys a very good reputation and pupils know when they enter that expectations are high. They respond very well and are highly enthusiastic about their learning. During discussions, pupils of all ages say they feel pleased and very proud to be able to attend such a popular and highly regarded school.

8. Pupils like the school's friendly atmosphere and speak very highly of their teachers. They recognise that teachers have a high level of subject expertise and appreciate the good quality of the teaching they receive. Pupils respond very well to the high level of intellectual stimulation and challenge seen in most lessons and they develop a strong desire to learn and succeed. Teachers and pupils are united by a sense of common purpose and their aspirations are high. Their shared commitment to education is reflected in the school motto 'Monumentum aere perennius' (a monument more lasting than bronze). Pupils particularly appreciate the way that teachers are always willing to give up their time in order to help with any personal or academic problems. Pupils have great trust in their teachers and relationships are exceptionally good. They feel valued as individuals and the friendly and supportive atmosphere makes a major contribution to pupils' high commitment to their studies and the standards achieved.
9. Pupils show great self-discipline and are very responsible. They live and work in an environment where respect and tolerance for others are paramount and this quickly becomes a natural way of life. During the inspection, pupils of all ages were unfailingly polite and considerate. Analysis of the pupils' questionnaire showed that around one-third of pupils knew of incidents of bullying or racist abuse and one in five was dissatisfied with standards of behaviour. The inspection team explored these issues with many pupils during the inspection. The general response was one of surprise at the findings of the questionnaire. All agreed that instances of bullying and racism were very rare and if they did occur were dealt with immediately and effectively. Inspectors agree with this very positive picture. Because procedures for managing behaviour and all forms of harassment are highly effective this is a very harmonious school.
10. There are many opportunities for pupils to take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school and they respond with great enthusiasm. For example, they run the school council and organise numerous fund raising events. As well as supporting local and national charities, girls in Years 8 and 9 host a party for pupils of a nearby special school. Pupils develop well as outgoing and confident young people and this makes a significant contribution to the school's lively and vibrant atmosphere. The resilience and good nature of pupils is clearly seen in the cheerful way in which they have accepted the discomfort caused by the rebuilding programme.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1010	2	0

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

11. Excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development makes a significant contribution pupils' increasing maturity. Pupils are assisted to consider and respond to questions on the meaning and purpose of life in religious education. They show that they have a clear set of values and many of them have strong religious beliefs. Pupils' concern for others is clearly demonstrated in involvement in works of charity. Assemblies make a significant contribution to spiritual awareness and through exposure to the inspirational works of poets, artists, musicians and others pupils develop an appreciation of the meaning of creativity. Pupils' moral and social development is effectively nurtured through the whole ethos of the school and they are provided with numerous opportunities to think about and demonstrate their concern for others. They know right from wrong and collaborate effectively when working with others. The well-planned school curriculum ensures that cultural awareness is given a high profile within the pupils' overall learning environment. The

promotion of an understanding of the nature of ethnic and cultural diversity in contemporary

society is a strong feature of many areas of the curriculum. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities that are provided to explore the culture and religious beliefs of others.

Sixth form

12. Almost all Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form, where they continue to display excellent attitudes towards their work. These attitudes are exemplified by students' regular attendance, their focus and concentration in lessons, their independent study skills and the well organised files of notes and work that were seen during the inspection. In addition, students play a very active part in many aspects of the school. For instance, through the positions of head girl and deputy, senior prefects, prefects, games captains and other representatives students take responsibility, among other things, for supporting lower school form teachers, welcoming and looking after visitors, and organising and providing hospitality for sports matches. All Year 12 students act as mentors for Year 8 pupils, providing them with real friendship, support and help with a range of issues. They are excellent role models for these younger pupils.
13. Through the opportunities provided for them students blossom into very self-assured, mature, articulate and confident young women. They have a high profile in and around the school, are excellent ambassadors for the school in the wider community and value highly what the school provides for them.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good because teaching, learning, the curriculum, assessment, and support and guidance are very effective and promote very good achievement. The only shortcomings relate to the amount of curriculum time allocated to religious education, the provision of a daily act of corporate worship and the accommodation. Excellent links with other schools and colleges enhance provision, as does the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities that not only contributes well to the standards attained but also to the enjoyment of school life. Links with the community are very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 13. The good use of assessment to help to maintain and further raise standards is one reason why pupils' achievement is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The effective use of teachers' expertise and their high expectations lead to accelerated and successful learning.
- The emphasis on developing literacy leads to generally high standards of expression and presentation in most subjects.
- Pupils' progress and achievement are carefully tracked and most teachers set challenging and manageable targets through their marking.
- Pupils are exceptionally well motivated because of the balance of care and challenge, which characterises the school's approach to learning.
- Very good teaching in the sixth form is a major factor in the achievement of high standards.
- Sixth form students' high levels of motivation and determination to succeed help to ensure highly effective learning and progress.
- Good procedures for assessing students' work ensure that they know how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve further.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 155 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15 (10%)	67 (43%)	58 (38%)	13 (8%)	2 (1%)	0	0

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

14. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. There is now more good, very good and excellent teaching. Teaching is now very good or excellent in about a half of lessons compared with about a third of lessons at the time of the last inspection. There are now many examples of outstanding practice. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is very small and similar to that noted in the last inspection report. It was not possible to observe Year 11 lessons during the period of the inspection because these pupils were taking mock GCSE examinations. As a result judgements on the quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are based on the observation of Year 10 lessons, the scrutiny of Year 10 and 11 pupils' work and discussions with them about their work. The school's self-evaluation judged teaching and learning to be very good. The evidence from the inspection securely confirms this.

Example of outstanding practice

This geography lesson provided Year 7 pupils with an opportunity to engage in genuine enquiry-based learning.

The pupils had previously completed a lesson on rock identification, introducing them to sandstone, granite, marble and limestone. They had undertaken fieldwork in a graveyard near the school during which they selected about 30 headstones and, for each one, recorded date, aspect and rock type as well as scoring on a 1 to 5 scale the degree of weathering it displayed. In this follow-up lesson, pupils recorded their aims, hypotheses and methodology and were required to explain the meaning of these terms. They worked well together as they analysed their results and recorded the average weathering score for each rock type before producing a graph of their results and interpreting their findings. In a plenary session, pupils showed that they had acquired a very good understanding both of the enquiry process, which is very similar to that required in the GCSE course, and factors affecting the weathering of rocks. The unit of work is challenging, stretching even the highest attaining pupils, but is made manageable by careful planning. Pupils were engrossed in the lesson and proud of their work.

15. The drive to improve the quality of teaching has been led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team who have given the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning a high priority. The outcome of this is that teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in other years, where the level of challenge increases. This increasing level of challenge links directly with the improving quality of learning as pupils go through the school. The majority of lessons are very well planned, taught with real pace and purpose, and teachers' high expectations are met with concentrated attention and willing involvement. Not surprisingly in these circumstances pupils consistently do better than predicted. They know they are taught well and appreciate it.
16. The school is conscious of the need to promote race equality and teaching takes account of pupils' ethnic origins and individual beliefs, customs and traditions. As a result all groups of pupils achieve well. In the vast majority of lessons pupils are fully engaged because the learning activities are well matched to their needs. Teaching in the best lessons is characterised by the effective use of the teacher's subject expertise to provide clear explanations and probe pupils' understanding. Teachers transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject and succeed in capturing pupils' interest and enthusiasm. This is seen in modern foreign languages where pupils make very good progress because teachers successfully transmit their own enthusiasm for language learning. In most lessons very good progress is made because pupils rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was

seen in all subjects and particularly in some excellent lessons observed in English, mathematics, science, French, German, information and communication technology (ICT), religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Many lessons have a pace and liveliness that encourages pupils to express their views and to challenge each other's thinking. This is particularly beneficial to the learning of gifted and talented pupils. Strategies are now being implemented that will enable this very good practice to be shared more widely in the school.

17. The school carries out detailed analyses of pupils' performance in tests and examinations and this information is presented to subject leaders who make good use of it in the planning of teaching and learning. Pupils talk appreciatively of the availability of teachers, and of the procedures for review and target setting. These features of good teaching beyond the classroom help explain why pupils do so well. The quality of marking is generally good. In English, for example, pupils receive regular and detailed comments on their writing and other work and this in turn leads to demonstrable progress. However, marking in science does not always provide pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do in order to improve. In history, the use of a single grade covering both attainment and effort does not provide pupils with clear enough guidance on the standard of their work. The very effective use of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning also makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement.
18. Teaching is very good for pupils who have special educational needs. Subject teachers are fully informed on the needs of pupils and account is taken of the objectives of the individual education plans of pupils with sensory impairment or physical disability. This ensures that teaching methods and resources are suited to their needs. Pupils with emotional or behaviour difficulties are given targets for improvement with strategies and support to help them to achieve the targets.
19. The school's literacy programme is very good and strongly supports pupils' achievement. All departments give active attention to subject specific terminology. Pupils' progress in the light of the literacy strategy is monitored, and provision across subjects is constantly reviewed. The development and application of pupils' numeracy skills is generally good. In some subjects, such as ICT and design and technology, the handling of number is integral to the work and is well taught in context. However, in physics, some pupils have difficulty in applying their mathematical knowledge in a scientific context.

Sixth form

20. Teaching in more than half of all sixth form lessons observed during the inspection was very good with examples of excellence in German, mathematics and religious studies. Lessons are characterised by teachers' high expectations and an increasing level of challenge that builds well on lessons in Years 10 and 11. An example of this is seen in French where, in Year 13, lessons are conducted entirely in the foreign language. Teachers' excellent command of and enthusiasm for their subjects enable them to extend and sharpen students' own knowledge and understanding through probing and pertinent questioning, leading to a high level of intellectual debate and enquiry. Students' learning is promoted by their sense of purpose, their industry, application and productivity both in lessons and in their private study time.
21. In most subjects there is an encouragement to study and learn independently. Students value the way in which they are expected to develop their own opinions and to become critical and discriminating learners. In only two or three lessons observed was students' learning too tightly controlled by the teacher and discussion not used to explore and extend understanding. Another positive feature of teaching, observed during the inspection in English language and literature, mathematics and religious education, is the focus on how to achieve high marks in examinations.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent teaching led to excellent learning in a Year 13 religious education lesson

Through the use of a highly stimulating and thought-provoking question and answer session characterised by the teacher's clear awareness of the needs of the individual, the teacher enabled students to understand the relationship between freedom and accountability. Students generated their own questions extremely well and with complete confidence. The teacher's expert subject knowledge and ability to draw out very difficult ideas ensured that all students developed a clear understanding of the links between Calvin's views of God and determinism. This was reinforced through class discussion during which the teacher challenged individual students to explore their own ideas about free will and an omnipotent God. The excellent quality of the relationships between students and between students and the teacher, gave students the confidence to explore their own personal views. Students demonstrated higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. The high degree of challenge in the lesson enabled students to extend their understanding and develop clear and well balanced arguments. This made a significant contribution to the excellent learning progress made in the lesson.

22. The assessment of students' work is effective in showing them how to improve. The best practice sets up a dialogue with students, provoking them to further their intellectual and creative effort. Peer assessment, self-assessment, the use of models, and marking which refers to assessment objectives and criteria are all used to sharpen students' understanding and to support their achievement.

The curriculum

The curriculum is broad and provides very well for the particular needs interests and aptitudes of pupils in this school. It is a specifically academic curriculum suitable to the nature of the school and the expectations of pupils and parents. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils, and for PSHE, modern foreign languages and music is excellent. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Staffing is very good and resources are good. The accommodation is poor.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A broad and well-balanced curriculum that engages pupils' interests and which is highly suited to their needs.
- Very good careers advice and guidance enable all pupils to make well-informed choices.
- The excellent provision in modern foreign languages enables pupils to have access to four foreign languages.
- Statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, are not met.
- The sixth form curriculum provides a very good range of advanced courses.
- A good core studies programme, including entry for A-level general studies, is provided for all sixth form students.
- Sixth form students are very well prepared for the next stage of education or employment.

Commentary

23. The school provides equal access to a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities in the main school. The curriculum provides a wide range of learning opportunities to suit the needs and aptitudes of almost all pupils. This is evidenced by the very high number of pupils who continue their education in the school to the end of Year 13. Only a few leave school at the end of Year 11 or Year 12, either to continue their studies in further education or to go into employment. The curriculum was judged to be good in the last inspection report and has improved since that time. The most significant development has been the achievement of specialist language college status, which has led to increases in the number of languages offered to pupils and the number of pupils taking foreign languages. Plans to alter the structure of the teaching week to allow more curriculum time for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science have been delayed because of the disruption caused by the

rebuilding programme, as has the full implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy with regard to ICT. With the exceptions of the provision of enough curriculum time to adequately cover the Agreed Syllabus in religious education in Years 10 and 11, and the provision of a daily act of collective worship, all statutory requirements are met. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into school life with equal access to all parts of the curriculum.

Example of outstanding practice

The impact of language college status on the quality of education the school provides

The award of specialist language college status has improved provision for modern foreign languages within the school, especially through the impact on learning of very good new accommodation and excellent technological resources. Other subject areas are now beginning to benefit from the sharing of expertise. The school has used some of its funding to invest in extra hours from their foreign language assistants, who support learning extremely well. Over 200 adults attend classes to learn languages such as Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Welsh as well as the more traditional ones. Pupils from other secondary schools attend after school to learn languages that are not offered in their own schools. Teachers from the school engage in language teaching in nine primary and two secondary schools, together with a local special school. The language college co-ordinator provides very effective management of this very full range of local activities, which are supplemented by links with schools in Germany, Denmark and Poland through the Comenius project. The school's outstanding contribution to language learning in the local and wider community is recognised by the International Schools Award.

24. In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum is supplemented by religious education and PSHE. The PSHE programme, which is taught in all years, is excellent both in terms of the planning to cover drug, alcohol and sex education, and the quality of teaching. Pupils benefit from being taught two languages from French, German and Spanish, from Year 8. This continues in Years 10 and 11 where it is possible for pupils to study two languages to GCSE level. The school manages innovation well. In Year 9, for example, there are imaginative projects that link art, drama and languages, and in Year 10, projects that link design and technology with modern foreign languages. The National Key Stage 3 strategy has been introduced in English, mathematics and science, and is having a positive impact on standards. The strategy is now being extended to other subjects.
25. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides a very good range of mainly academic optional subjects. In response to the above average ability the intake and the wishes of parents, senior management and governors have decided that this range of courses is best suited to the pupils' needs. However, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is under constant review and the need to provide more flexible pathways for pupils who may be more suited to an alternative curriculum form part of school improvement planning.
26. Opportunities for enrichment are excellent throughout the school. Large numbers of pupils take part in the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities the school provides. These activities, which include, for example, the physics telescope club and the spelling club, cater well for the needs and interests of pupils of all attainment levels and particularly for the needs of gifted and talented pupils. Each department offers 'study hall', which is a fixed after school session that pupils can access in different subjects on different days of the week. This provides valuable additional opportunities for pupils to engage in extension work that is suited to their individual needs and contributes well to their achievement. In recognition of the very good quality of the extra-curricular provision in sport, the school received the gold Sportsmark award in 2003. Participation rates and standards are high. In netball, for example, 120 primary and secondary pupils regularly attend the weekly netball club and school teams compete successfully at regional and national levels. The additional use that pupils make of the ICT rooms at lunchtimes and after school makes a positive contribution to the development of their computing skills. Large numbers of pupils participate in the arts, particularly in music, and the school has a wide range of orchestras, bands, choirs and smaller performing groups. Other enrichment activities include Young Enterprise, the Youth Parliament and visits to universities, all of which considerably extend pupils' learning opportunities.

27. Staffing is very well matched to the needs of the curriculum. Very well qualified, experienced and committed staff bring considerable expertise to their teaching and this underpins pupils' success in tests and examinations. Because of promotions and retirements there have been more changes in the teachers employed in the school over the last two years than in previous years. These changes have been managed well, and teachers new to the school speak highly of the very good induction and support they receive. Support staff make a good contribution to pupils' learning and contribute well to the smooth operation of practical work in science, design and technology, art and ICT.
28. Resources for learning are good. The school operates a well-considered and equitable system for devolving the resource budget to subjects and as a result resources are good in all subjects. The school has invested substantially in ICT over recent years and the ratio of computers to pupils is now better than the national average. The new school library provides an excellent learning resource. The well-qualified school librarian is ensuring that the range of books, journals, computer software and other resources meet the needs of subjects.
29. Although some aspects of the accommodation are very good, the overall quality of the accommodation is poor. The school is in the middle of an extensive refurbishment and rebuilding programme. The parts of the programme that have been completed, such as the sixth form common room, the school library and the ICT and technology rooms provide very good accommodation. However, the main contractor has not been able to complete the programme by the agreed date and this has caused serious disruption to teaching and learning as well as school administration. The start of the school term had to be delayed for two weeks because of incomplete building work. This delay has had a significant impact on the planning of teaching and learning, and in particular in ensuring full coverage of the examination syllabuses in the upper years. Extra lessons are being offered at lunch times and after school in order to make sure that pupils and students are not disadvantaged by these difficulties. Nevertheless, there is continuing noise and disturbance from building work that should have been completed during the summer vacation. Much teaching takes place in 20 temporary mobile classrooms. Many of these rooms are damp and do not allow teachers to make full use of the subject's resources to support teaching and learning.

Sixth form

30. The school makes very good provision for the academic sixth formers it attracts, through a range of 25 subjects offered at AS and A-level. Although the school has offered some vocational courses in the past the take-up was too small for the courses to be viable so it now sensibly concentrates on what is most appropriate for students' needs. Although numbers in some subjects such as further mathematics, economics, music and textiles are small, these are balanced and supported by large groups in other subjects.
31. The good core studies programme supports the academic courses that students choose to study. Through this, all Year 12 students follow one-term courses in advanced ICT applications and in communication skills. This latter is approached imaginatively through the link with the local talking newspaper for visually impaired people. Students create, record and edit a magazine section to be sent out with the newspaper. During the third term in Year 12 and continuing in Year 13, the course focuses on A-level general studies. As well as enabling students to gain another A-level subject, the course offers opportunities to explore moral, philosophical and social issues and to follow up a topic in depth for the course work essay. However, although there is a religious education element to this course the statutory requirement for religious education is not met in full. A further shortcoming in the curriculum for sixth form students is the lack of curriculum time for physical education for those students not taking the advanced course.

32. As in the main school, the curriculum for sixth form students is enriched by many opportunities outside the classroom. The school's status as a specialist language college offers courses, for example, in Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese. There are trips abroad, music, drama and sports activities, some of these organised and run by the sixth form students for younger pupils, and many opportunities for students to take responsibility.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety have further improved since the previous inspection and are now excellent. The school also provides excellent support, advice and guidance and involves pupils very well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school attaches the highest importance to pupils' well-being and arrangements to meet the needs of particular individuals are outstandingly effective.
- The academic progress made by all pupils is closely tracked and this helps them to make very good progress in their work.
- Very well-planned induction procedures help new pupils to settle quickly.
- Procedures for seeking pupils' views are highly effective and the school acts upon their suggestions and concerns wherever possible.
- Pupils have very good guidance when making option choices at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The head of sixth form and his team of tutors provide highly effective and sensitive support to sixth form students.
- Students receive excellent guidance about higher education and employment and have access to an outstanding careers library.

Commentary

33. The strengths in care, support and guidance noted in the last report have been maintained. Pupils are exceptionally very well looked after during the school day. First aid and child protection procedures are comprehensive and members of staff fully understand their individual roles. All health and safety procedures related to the extensive re-development taking place on the school site meet with the full approval of the local education and fire authorities.
34. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic achievements and personal development are thorough and help teachers to provide very good support, advice and guidance. Assessment information is used very well to set individual targets and to identify and tackle any difficulties at an early stage. Intervention may take the form of additional academic support or support from the learning mentor. The effectiveness of this support is seen in pupils' very good achievement. Close liaison with a wide range of external social and health agencies ensures that pupils receive very good individual advice and guidance. Teachers mark pupils' work very carefully and provide pupils with clear guidance on how they can improve their work. This information gives pupils confidence for the future and contributes well towards their outstandingly positive attitudes towards learning.
35. The school accepts pupils from a very wide geographical area and over 40 primary schools. Many pupils arrive knowing very few other pupils. However, very good induction procedures help new pupils to settle in quickly and to make new friends. Pupils in Year 7 speak warmly of the welcome they received. For example, every pupil receives a visit while they are still at their primary schools and a Year 12 student shows new entrants around the school during the summer term induction day. This helps pupils and staff to get to know each other and pupils are always encouraged to seek advice, should any concerns or worries crop up.

36. The school regularly seeks pupils' views and takes these into account whenever possible. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to comment on curricular issues as well as the day-to-day life of the school. Pupils helped with the design of the excellent new school planner and, through the school council, pupils have successfully lobbied for the introduction of a tuck shop.
37. Teachers provide pupils with very good information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. A dedicated and well-qualified team of teachers advises each individual on the most appropriate options. The strength of their advice is reflected in the pupils' examination success and the very low dropout rates from the various courses.

Sixth form

38. Guidance and support about AS courses before students enter the sixth form is highly effective as few students change courses and the retention rates on sixth form courses are very high. The procedures for supporting and monitoring students' academic and personal progress are currently being extended and made more systematic. Previously, regular mentoring has been made available to those students experiencing problems but the head of sixth form and sixth form tutors are extending this level of support to all Year 12 students. Each student is now being interviewed on a regular basis by her tutor so that a clearer overview of each student's progress and development can be gained.
39. Guidance and advice about applications to higher education are very well developed. Advice for those students who are applying to further education, for instance, for arts foundation courses, and to employment is also very helpful.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents and with the community are very good. Links with other schools and colleges are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent links with other schools enrich the curriculum and strongly support pupils' personal development.
- Very good links with the local and international community, especially in modern foreign languages and physical education, broaden pupils' horizons and foster their personal development very effectively.
- Parents hold the school in very high regard and they encourage their children to do their very best.
- The quality of information provided for parents about day-to-day events, the curriculum and their children's progress is very good.
- Sixth form students contribute very well to the local community.
- Strong links with colleges and universities are used effectively to extend the curriculum for sixth form students.

Commentary

40. Liaison with the primary schools from which pupils are drawn is very effective, even though these cover over 40 schools and a very wide geographical area. Given the large number of primary schools it is very difficult to establish close curriculum links with all of these schools. However, the school recognises the importance of developing such links and the sharing of good practice is part of the school's culture. For example, the school's status as a specialist language college provides many opportunities to engage and interest pupils, parents and the wider community. Foreign language lessons are held in local primary and secondary schools, and pupils from several Wirral secondary schools undertake twilight lessons in languages that their own schools cannot provide. Furthermore, several hundred members from the local community also undertake evening language lessons to GCSE standard and beyond. Sporting

links are also very good and individual pupils and school teams regularly compete at local, regional and national level. Through the European Comenius project, there are very good links with schools in Germany, Denmark and Poland. In recognition of this work, the school recently received the 2002 Euro Wirral International Schools Award.

41. As part of the inspection process, parents completed a questionnaire that requested their views on numerous areas of school life. Analysis of their responses shows that they are pleased with almost every area of the school's work. This reflects the fact that this school has an excellent reputation and is heavily over-subscribed. Some parents felt that they do not receive enough information about their children's progress. Inspectors disagree; the quality of information the school provides for parents is very good. Parents receive a written report each term and there is at least one opportunity a year to speak with their children's teachers. In addition, teachers are always willing to see parents if they request a meeting and the school website also displays general information.
42. Parents are very interested in their children's education and they support them very well at school and at home. Despite the large distances many pupils travel, their attendance is above average and they arrive ready, able and very willing to work. Activities organised by the parents' association are very well supported and significant sums of money are raised to provide additional learning resources. Parents' wholehearted support for the school puts their children in a position where they are able to commit themselves fully to their studies to achieve very well.

Sixth form

43. Sixth form students take seriously their responsibilities to others. As well as the Year 12 input to the local talking newspaper, students make regular visits to a local retirement home, to a special school and to several primary schools. These activities contribute to the life of the community and also to students' development as responsible citizens.
44. There are very good links with colleges and universities. At the beginning of Year 12 in 2003 all students attended an induction course at Bangor University, which they feel helped to bond them as a year group and had a very good impact on their study skills. Many visits during the year are organised to master classes, study days and conferences to give them a real feel for what higher education has to offer them.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes very good use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is very good. Two statutory requirements are not met, but neither of these omissions have an adverse effect on pupils' achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has ensured that the morale of staff and pupils has remained high during a period of considerable disruption caused by the rebuilding programme.
- The quality of leadership and management of staff with key roles is very good.
- The effective monitoring of teaching and learning, and the rigorous use of performance information, make significant contributions to standards and achievement.
- The school benefits from the very good support of governors and their effectiveness in carrying out their duties.
- Full statutory requirements with regard to the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, and the provision of a daily act of corporate worship are not met.

- The very good leadership of the sixth form is based on giving a sense of ownership to the students and enabling them to take a substantial role in running the school.
- Sixth form tutors maintain a very good balance between encouraging students to be independent, while providing them with strong support when necessary.

Commentary

45. There is common agreement amongst staff, governors and pupils that the headteacher has rejuvenated the school since taking up her appointment two years ago. The headteacher has brought a clear vision for the future of the school. This vision is based firmly on the need to seek continued improvement. Under her leadership the school is not only a more ambitious and open institution but also one in which there is a much greater appreciation of the need to engage in rigorous self-evaluation. The headteacher has secured a common understanding that there is no room for complacency and there is now a much greater awareness of the need to continue to improve teaching and learning as the key to raising standards even further. Amongst the strengths of the headteacher are her excellent inter-personal and coaching skills. These skills have not only been used very effectively to develop teamwork in the school, but have also proved essential in maintaining staff and pupil morale during the period in which the rebuilding programme has been taking place. Apart from the normal disruption that would be caused by any major rebuilding programme, numerous additional problems have been caused by contractual disputes between the main and sub-contractors. These have led on occasion to sub-contractors leaving their work and walking off the site. This was the case in the weeks leading up to the inspection. The school has at times been without electricity, telephones and water. In the midst of all of this, the headteacher has maintained her buoyant spirit and worked hard with senior managers, teachers and governors to minimise the impact of these problems on the quality of education the school provides. Everyone with whom the inspection team came into contact was keen to have recognised how important the headteacher's personal qualities have been through this very difficult period in the life of the school.
46. The senior management team, which has been restructured since the appointment of the headteacher, is very effective. Members of the management team have complementary skills and have proved to be very influential in pursuing the goal of continued improvement. For example, through their lead on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, making effective use of assessment information to evaluate performance and engaging in reviews of the work of departments, they are making a significant contribution to the school's high standards. The system for line management from the management team to the other levels of management is very effective in achieving consistency in standards and practices across the school. Other key staff share the headteacher's vision and work hard in their own areas of responsibility to achieve the school's targets. Subject leadership is excellent in English, modern foreign languages, music, and citizenship, and good or very good in most other subjects. Performance management is fully implemented. The school improvement plan is comprehensive, contains appropriate targets and is closely linked to department plans. Planning for improvement in subject departments is generally good at all levels.
47. The management of special educational needs and of provision for gifted and talented pupils, is highly effective. The clarity of the documentation and the quality of the information the co-ordinator provides to teachers helps to ensure that all pupils make very good progress.
48. Governors are very supportive of the school and carry out their statutory duties well. They are committed to the school's drive to maintain and further raise standards, and fully endorse the principle of ensuring that the school provides for the needs of all groups of pupils. Governors have made a very strong contribution to the success of the school by helping to shape its strategic direction. For example, they were fully involved in the decision to become a language college and are very active in formulating and reviewing the school improvement plan. As a result governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors have had many discussions about the need to provide a daily act of corporate worship. Because the school does not have an indoor space large enough to accommodate all

pupils, lower and upper school assemblies are held on alternate days. These assemblies have strong religious and moral themes, and include a corporate act of worship. It is intended that a 'thought for the day' programme should be covered in tutor groups on the days that pupils do not have a morning assembly. All tutors do not implement this programme consistently and so the arrangement does not fully meet the statutory requirement.

49. One of the strengths of the school is the way in which it manages its financial resources. The finance committee monitors the budget with care and as a result they have targeted expenditure according to priorities in the school improvement plan. In this way the school is able to allocate its resources in a way that has the most direct impact on pupils' achievement and also to evaluate how effective spending decisions have been. Best value principles are applied to all spending.

Sixth form

50. The head of sixth form and his team of tutors are dedicated to enabling students to reach the highest possible standards. Leadership is self-critical, and although there is as yet no formal review system as there is for subject departments, the head of sixth form knows that the head teacher expects him constantly to review practice and to effect any necessary improvements. The improvement in the mentoring of Year 12 students is an example of this continuing drive for excellence. Those students facing major upheavals or ongoing problems in their personal lives are provided with strong and sensitive guidance and support.
51. The head of sixth form establishes an excellent ethos through the year assemblies and it is clear that he is both well regarded, liked and respected by staff and students alike. Sixth form tutors strive to ensure that students are provided with many opportunities for self-improvement through service to the school and the wider community. It is partly due to these efforts that the students are such an impressive, welcoming, caring and thoughtful group of young adults.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,172,759
Total expenditure	3,177,830
Expenditure per pupil	3,103

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	187,676
Balance carried forward to the next	182,605

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good planning facilitates very good progress and takes into account the different ways in which pupils learn.
- Teachers' very strong subject knowledge is used effectively to support pupils' learning.
- The department recognises and develops the strengths of its members to create an excellent team.
- The strong emphasis on literacy underpins high standards.
- The shortage of curriculum time restricts opportunities for independent and creative work in lessons.

Commentary

52. Pupils' attainment in English when they enter the school is well above average. Standards in tests in 2003 at the end of Year 9 were very high in comparison to all schools, and above average when compared to similar schools. Because there is a broader spread of ability at the school than is typical for selective schools, this comparison underestimates pupils' very good achievement. All pupils gain grades A* to C in GCSE examinations in language and literature. Standards seen during the inspection confirm these impressive results. The high quality of teaching and learning explains why demanding targets are consistently met.
53. Achievement is very good both in the lower and upper years. Pupils of all ages and abilities achieve better than expected. Pupils' writing shows how the department's focus on literacy skills raises standards across the board. Through drafting, specific attention to spelling and grammar, and in response to teachers' marking, all pupils produce well-ordered and accurate pieces in a range of styles. Pupils' self-assessment is well developed by Year 11— both for writing and for speaking and listening. This is an important feature of the independent learning which the school seeks to foster. From Year 7 onwards pupils are required to be thoughtful (through reading autobiographies for example) about their development as readers and writers. On account of such procedures, pupils' work is extended and capable at all levels of ability and becomes progressively more assured (as in imaginatively managed narratives, or in perceptive analyses of GCSE texts) as they go through the school.
54. Teaching and learning are very good from Years 7 to 11. A combination of teachers' expert subject knowledge, high expectations and excellent relationships leads to learning which is enjoyable and productive for all concerned. Lessons have momentum, clear purposes and motivating variety. For example Year 9 pupils were reminded of the features of argumentative writing through a game of 'connectives bingo'. They then had to apply that knowledge to reading, writing and debate in a brilliantly orchestrated series of activities, which stretched and involved them. It was outstanding teaching. Pupils responded accordingly, and made tremendous progress. No observed lesson was less than very good. This remarkable consistency explains the typically high rates of progress and achievement in English.

55. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. The strengths of the team are acknowledged and capitalised on. Collaborative planning, regular meetings, joint observations to share successful approaches, clearly defined responsibilities for aspects of the curriculum: these arrangements characterise the professional and supportive ways of working of a dedicated group of very good teachers. An impediment to further progress is the amount of time currently available for English in the curriculum. The school acknowledges this and plans to amend the timetable to give a better allocation. Nevertheless, at the time of the inspection, the cracking pace and focus of lessons was a matter of necessity rather than choice. Things are too pressured for pupils and teachers, and opportunities for creativity and reflection in lessons are limited. The very substantial programme of extra-curricular activities partly compensates for this (reading groups, the spelling club, theatre visits, public speaking and writing competitions) but more curriculum time remains a priority.
56. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Very high standards in public examinations have been maintained and improved upon. The issues raised (concerning the use of ICT in English, a degree of inconsistency in marking and the occasional instance of teaching which failed to actively involve pupils) have been tackled and now constitute strengths in the work of the department.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. An emphasis on literacy development is a strong feature of the school's work. It is a priority in the school development plan. There is a comprehensive policy and a clearly documented system for auditing the literacy work of departments and monitoring pupils' progress. The Literacy Group, overseen by an assistant head, meets and reports regularly. There is a designated 'literacy governor'. All subject teachers focus pupils' attention on the vocabulary and structures needed for their part of the curriculum. Subjects such as history, geography and religious education help pupils develop ideas through extended writing. In English and modern foreign languages literacy development is excellent because of the consistency and skill of teachers in helping pupils to understand how language works.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high throughout Years 7 to 11, in French, German, Spanish and Italian.
- Most pupils achieve standards that exceed expectations.
- Much teaching is very good or excellent. Imaginative tasks and skilful use of resources have a very positive impact on attitudes and learning.
- Excellent leadership and management foster a caring approach and constant striving for further improvement from an able and hard-working team.
- New accommodation and resources, especially for ICT, promote active learning.

Commentary

58. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9, and GCSE results at the end of Year 11, show standards to be high in comparison to national averages, in all languages. Many pupils, including a significant number who take GCSE in Year 10, gain A* or A grades. The majority of pupils exceed expectations in their level of achievement. Inspection evidence confirms very high standards, with a continuing trend of improvement. Pupils learn vocabulary and grammatical structures diligently from the start of their courses, enabling them to write full descriptions and accounts by Year 9. They exchange information from memory, with very good pronunciation, and identify most details in increasingly long passages, written or spoken

in the foreign language. By Year 11, pupils are often confident language users, conversing on a range of topics and using the full range of required tenses in extended written work. Literacy skills are particularly well developed through work in the subject.

59. Teaching and learning are very good. There is a significant amount of very good and excellent teaching, and none that is less than good. Teachers use the foreign language consistently, demonstrating high expectations and providing excellent models. Enthusiasm for language learning transmits to pupils, whose exemplary attitudes and behaviour support their learning effectively. Teachers make excellent use of the range of technological resources now available to them in new accommodation, especially in the department's ICT suite and with the interactive whiteboards in each classroom, emphasizing the visual aspect in learning. A Year 10 German class e-mailed their homework exercise to their home computers, and sent the completed task back into the school's system for correction. Such imaginative tasks provide opportunities for creative use of language and early progress towards independent learning. Homework extends work done in lessons very well, and teachers' constructive marking reflects a caring approach to their pupils. They benefit from correction and know how to improve. Foreign language assistants contribute well in French, German and Spanish, allowing pupils to develop their cultural knowledge and oral skills through communication with real native speakers.
60. The head of department is ably assisted by heads of the separate languages. He provides excellent leadership and management. His expertise with Powerpoint presentation and innovative use of other resources is well disseminated, so that all teachers use technology with increasing confidence to support learning. Very good self-evaluation and assessment procedures enable the department to use data effectively to seek ways to improve standards even further. Curricular provision is excellent. All pupils learn two languages in Years 8 and 9. Collaboration with food technology and graphics provides GNVQ courses. Pupils taking GCSE in Year 10 subsequently learn a second or third language and further develop their first language through Comenius project work, with schools in Germany, Denmark and Poland. There are many opportunities for enrichment through clubs, visits and exchanges, which pupils enjoy. Since the previous inspection, the school has achieved languages college status and more recently the lead languages department award, both acknowledging excellent provision and a good rate of improvement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and 11 are very high.
- Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9 is good and very good by the end of Year 11.
- Very good teaching inspires pupils to achieve highly.
- Very good leadership and management provide clear direction continued improvement.
- Learning objectives are not reviewed and summarised at the end of some lessons.

Commentary

61. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were very high in comparison with all schools and above average in comparison with selective schools. Although standards on entry are above average, there is a broader spread of ability at the school than is typical for selective schools. Because of this the comparison with other selective schools underestimates pupils' achievement, which is good. Standards seen in lessons are well above average and consistent with the results obtained in the national tests. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good, because they are motivated to learn and teaching engages them in imaginative ways. Learning builds on their previous knowledge and allows

them to develop their knowledge and understanding systematically. As a result pupils become mathematically very confident and numerically very competent. They generally apply their numerical skills effectively in other subjects.

62. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were very high with almost all pupils obtaining A* to C grades. When compared with other selective schools the results were above average, representing very good achievement. All pupils who attain high levels at the end of Year 9 go on to achieve the higher grades at the end of Year 11. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A* and A considerably exceeds that achieved nationally. Work seen in Years 10 and 11 indicates that standards are consistent with the results obtained in the GCSE examination. These high standards are achieved because pupils are motivated by the consistently very good quality of teaching that leads to very good learning in lessons.
63. Teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. In all years teachers are beginning to use aspects of the practice outlined in the National Strategy for mathematics. The principle features of teaching include well focused planning, rigour and the very good use of subject knowledge to ensure pupils are well prepared for forthcoming examinations. On occasions, inspirational teaching captures pupils' interest in a way that leads to very high pupils involvement and much enjoyment in lessons. Examples of teaching of this quality were seen in most year groups. Effective use is made of mini white boards, graphical calculators and ICT to enhance pupils' learning. Teachers make good use of information on individual pupil performance to plan lessons that match the group and individual needs. Pupils are well known to the teachers and they receive extensive support both in and outside normal lesson time.
64. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the development of the subject with a focus on teaching and learning. There is a strong team of experienced specialist teachers who support each other well. Very good analyses of pupils' performance ensure that teachers are able to plan lessons that extend pupils at all levels of attainment. The department has undertaken a detailed self-review and as a result has formulated a well-structured plan to promote further improvement. Standards in mathematics by the end of Year 9 and 11 have improved steadily since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

65. Standards of numeracy are well above average. Pupils have a good command of number facts and are able to tackle numerical calculations in many different situations. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented well within mathematics and several other subjects have begun to incorporate strategies to support the systematic development of numeracy in their schemes of work. However, the full implementation of the strategy in all subjects has been delayed by the disruption caused by the rebuilding programme. There is very good practice in art, science, geography and design and technology, and good use is made of mathematical skills in the teaching of ICT.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results are very high at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE.
- Achievement from Year 7 to Year 11 is very good.
- Leadership and management in the science department are very good.
- The subject management arrangements do not enable the head of department to monitor teaching and learning in all science subjects.

Commentary

66. In 2003, National Curriculum test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were very high compared with national averages. When compared with other selective schools, results at Levels 6 and 7 were average. However, this does not reflect the true picture because there is a broader range of ability on entry than in most other selective schools. Taking this into account, achievement between Years 7 and 9 is good. Science results were similar to those for English but not as good as those for mathematics. Since the last inspection, results have improved at a rate, which was above results nationally.
67. GCSE examination results, in 2003, were very high in biology, chemistry, physics and dual award science. When compared with other selective schools, although physics results were slightly below average, results were well above average in biology and chemistry and above average in dual award science. When compared with test results at the end of Year 9, GCSE results in all subjects represent very good achievement.
68. As a result of good teaching, pupils, currently in the school, are making good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. For example, by the end of Y9, higher-attaining pupils can use chemical symbols and formulae to write equations for reactions. Lower-attaining pupils are less secure in their understanding of science but can, for example, explain how light is refracted. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 display a good understanding of chemical energetics. Lower-attaining pupils, however, whilst still achieving above average standards, are less secure in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils achieve very well and make very good progress. The standards of literacy and numeracy throughout the school in science are very good.
69. Teaching is good. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is good and in Years 10 and 11 it is very good. In one lesson teaching was excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Pupils learn well as a result. The principal features of teaching were the very effective use of teachers' subject knowledge, their high expectations of pupils, well-focused planning and, in most lessons, a range of methods which maintained interest and engendered learning. Homework was set which extended or consolidated work done in lessons. The identification of appropriate learning objectives, coupled with good support for pupils' learning, enables pupils, throughout the school, including those with special educational needs to make very good progress in improving their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts. In most lessons pupils work hard and at a good pace. However, a few lessons in physics are too teacher dominated. In these lessons pupils have too few opportunities for independent learning.
70. Leadership and management in the science department are very good. The head of science is dedicated and has a clear vision of what is needed to improve. As a result, the science department is developing into a cohesive unit in which teachers work as a single team. She is supported by an adequate number of well-qualified teachers. Educational direction is clear and focused. The procedures for assessment are good and improving. Its use to monitor the progress of pupils, to identify underachievers and guide curriculum planning, is particularly good in Years 7 and 8 and is being further developed to track the progress of pupils throughout the school. Although day-to-day marking is satisfactory, some books are not marked thoroughly and provide little information to pupils. The current arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning, by the head of science, are limited to biology teachers and do not enable her to monitor teaching and learning in other science subjects. This is a weakness and leads to fragmentation within the department. Resources, in terms of books and equipment, are satisfactory. The number of laboratories in the department is good. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Pupils are highly motivated and this helps them to learn well.
- Procedures for assessment and marking are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

Commentary

71. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 indicated standards were well above the national average. Standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with these assessments. Achievement is very good and pupils develop a wide range of high-level skills by the end of Year 9. Pupils continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and results in the GCSE short course examination in 2003 were well above average.
72. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their expertise well to teach new skills in stimulating contexts. Pupils enjoy ICT lessons and learn well because teachers make lessons interesting and challenging. As a result pupils are highly motivated and very well behaved. In the most successful lessons, teachers make effective use of assessment to refocus the lesson and introduce higher-level skills when pupils are ready to move forward. In Year 10 pupils' competent use of macros and 'look up' tables as short cut devices in spreadsheet work, enables more efficient working. Pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9 is enhanced by the use of self-assessment and the high quality of marking which provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work. Numeracy skills are effectively developed, pupils are encouraged to use mental calculations and prepare mathematical formulae to link different data on their spreadsheets. In the one unsatisfactory lesson observed, not enough progress was made because pupils were only required to carry out very simple information gathering activities that were well below their level of capability.
73. Leadership and management of the department are very good. A deputy headteacher manages the department very well in the temporary absence of the co-ordinator. There is a clear vision for the development of ICT and improvements are identified and managed well. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. The National Key Stage 3 ICT strategy is now being introduced. There are increased numbers of up-to-date computers and these resources are used well by pupils at lunchtime and after school. A network manager and two technicians look after the day-to-day management of ICT equipment effectively. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

74. Pupils show a good level of competence in the way in which they use ICT to support their work in other subjects. In particular, excellent use is made of ICT to support learning in modern foreign languages and pupils use ICT to e-mail homework to their teachers. Many teachers make use of Powerpoint presentations in lessons, and where interactive whiteboards are available they are used well to enhance learning. Pupils make very good use of computers in the library and ICT rooms at lunchtimes to carry out research activities and to enhance the presentation of coursework. The use of ICT is included in lesson planning and used well in most subjects.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

- Pupils work hard to meet the high expectations of teachers.
- Lessons are planned well to foster independent learning.
- Teachers provide pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do in order to improve their work.
- Not enough use is made of assessment information to raise the standards of lower attaining pupils.

Commentary

75. Standards in Years 7 to 11 are well above average. In 2003, teacher assessments showed over half of Year 9 reaching Level 7. GCSE results in 2003 showed that the percentage of pupils obtaining an A* grade was over four times the national average for girls. The standard of work seen is consistently very good. Pupils display very good use of geographical vocabulary, very good geographical knowledge and understanding of concepts and very good skills. Year 8 pupils apply their knowledge very effectively to identify the adaptations required by successful plants in different ecosystems. In Year 10, pupils show very good skills when describing patterns such as global population density. In relation to prior attainment pupils perform better than predicted in Year 9 and in line with expectations at GCSE. Achievement is greatest for the highest attaining pupils who, at GCSE, produce work of an exceptionally high standard, often beyond that recognised by the top grade.
76. Teaching and learning are good and frequently very good. Very high expectations permeate the department and teachers bring very strong subject knowledge, commitment and awareness of the learning needs of pupils. Lessons have clear learning outcomes, are well resourced, cater for different learning styles and meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils. They also provide identified opportunities to contribute to the development of citizenship, literacy, numeracy and personal and social education. Tasks are frequently imaginative and, as a result, pupils engage with lessons, and make good or very good progress. The department shows a commitment to developing enquiry-based learning. For example, in Year 7, pupils undertake fieldwork on weathering which introduces them to the approach to enquiry that will be used at GCSE and develops skills of independent learning. Assessment increasingly supports learning through the sharing of marking and grade criteria with pupils.
77. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory despite difficult circumstances created by the prolonged absence through illness of the newly appointed head of department. The acting head of department has maintained and taken forward many of the priorities established by the head of department. Common approaches to policy implementation, expectations, teaching approaches and the use of assessment are visible throughout the work of the department. In these respects the current leadership of the department is quietly effective. However, greater use should be made of assessment to set targets and to prioritise departmental action needed to raise the achievement of lower attaining pupils. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards remain very high and pupils make very good use of ICT in their coursework.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High standards in GCSE examinations
- Pupils' excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes lead to very good learning.
- Very good leadership and management underpin high quality teaching.
- Pupils are not given clear enough guidance through marking on the standard of their work in Years 7 to 9.
- Accommodation difficulties impede computer based lessons for whole classes

Commentary

78. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9, as reflected in teacher assessments in 2003, was well above the average for girls nationally, as all pupils reached the expected level and the majority comfortably exceeded it. In 2003, as in the previous year, all pupils achieved a pass grade at GCSE level, and the proportion achieving grades A* to C was well above average.
79. Standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with teachers' assessments and examination results. These are well above expectations at the end of Years 9 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, pupils make good progress and achieve well in demonstrating well-developed source interrogation and interpretation skills and a clear understanding of cause and consequence in history. They express themselves clearly and accurately orally and in writing, although their understanding of the nature and location of, for example, 18th century industrial change is less secure.
80. In the Years 10 and 11, standards of work seen were also well above expectations. Pupils compile substantial files of well-presented, logically organized and accurately completed work and reveal well-honed examination skills. They make good use of evidence in composing logically structured and argued essays, although occasionally do not make enough reference to chronology. They make considerable use of computers for research and communication and are particularly adept at constructing balanced responses to questions such as Stresemann's role in the economic recovery of Weimar Germany. In all years pupils are eager to learn, contribute readily, and co-operate whole-heartedly with their teachers. Pupils' highly positive attitudes make a significant contribution to their very good achievement.
81. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' subject expertise is particularly evident in the detailed study notes issued to Years 10 and 11, which enable pupils to actively develop demonstrable independence in their learning, through their knowledgeable discussion of issues raised. In these years pupils' learning is very well supported by the detailed comments offered by their teachers, the sharing of examination mark schemes and the widespread use of peer and self-assessment. However, the use of a single achievement grade to denote attainment in Years 7 to 9 does not give pupils a clear enough indication of the standard of their work and the scope for improvement.
82. The subject is very well managed and led and benefits from an experienced head of department who energetically pursues appropriate development priorities. There is a reflective and evaluative approach to improving the quality of teaching and curriculum innovation and close working relationships within the department support learning well. Despite the frequent and protracted disruption occasioned by problems connected with the building developments, good improvement has been sustained since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education has very many strengths but taken as a whole is **unsatisfactory** because of non-compliance with full statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in examinations are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and contributes very well to pupil achievement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Not enough curriculum time is allocated to the general course in Years 10 and 11 to fulfil statutory requirements.

Commentary

83. The small amount of time given to the general course means that it is not possible for the majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 to receive their full entitlement to religious education. As a result the requirements of the Wirral Agreed Syllabus are not met. However, provision in Years 7 to 9 and in the examination courses in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
84. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average in relation to the Agreed Syllabus. There are some good examples of pupils achieving well in developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. They are able to link their knowledge of religion with their everyday experiences. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work enable pupils to improve their speaking and listening skills.
85. Standards in Years 10 and 11 in the work seen are well above average. Standards in the GCSE course were well above the national average in 2003, and these compared favourably with similar schools. Pupils achieve very well in extending their knowledge and understanding of how they can learn from religion and apply it in their lives. Their skills of investigation and interpretation are very well developed. Pupils' spiritual and moral awareness is very strong. They demonstrate a deep respect for the views, faiths and traditions of each other.
86. Teachers make very effective use of discussion and questioning to enable pupils to express their opinions and form clear judgments about religious and moral issues. The very good progress pupils make in the GCSE course is underpinned by the very effective use of teachers' subject knowledge. Homework is well used to allow pupils to reflect on the information they have gained in class. Teachers have clear expectations of pupils and challenge them to succeed, and these are very effective in contributing to pupils' achievement. The assessment procedures provide a clear basis for assessing what pupils know and understand and pupils are clear from the detailed comments in their books about what they need to do to improve.
87. Curriculum leadership is very good, with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of the department approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment. He has been very successful in developing a strong team approach and is very well supported by two other teachers, both of whom are specialists. The monitoring of the work of teachers and pupils is well developed. The subject is managed very well and this is reflected in the quality of religious education provided for the pupils. Since the last inspection standards have improved. Good improvements have been made in planning and in the schemes of work. The quality of teaching has also improved. These have had a good impact on standards, pupil achievement and progress.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good match of teachers' expertise to the needs of the curriculum.
- The high expectations of teachers and pupils' keenness and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Well above average standards of work by the end of Year 11.
- Not enough structure and refinement in the use of Computer Aided Design.

Commentary

88. Standards at GCSE are very good in all material areas. In 2003 almost every pupil gained an A* to C grade with over half achieving A* or A grades. Results compare very well with other school subjects. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 is consistently very high. Pupils of different capabilities achieve very well. In all materials areas, pupils effectively apply design principles to increasingly demanding design and production tasks. Manufacture is well planned and pupils display confidence and skill in using a range of tools and equipment safely. As a result final products are well made. Evaluative and testing skills of both design and products are thoughtfully applied. Coursework folio management by pupils is good. However, ICT needs to be used more systematically in the control, design and manufacture of products in order to broaden the design capability of pupils of all abilities.
89. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 9 are above national expectations. Many pupils enter the school with very limited technological experience and so these standards represent good achievement. Pupils of all attainment levels manage design practice well. Good design skills are demonstrated and pupils are able to apply their skills confidently to a range of difficult design briefs. Analytical skills are systematically applied to proposed solutions. Technical knowledge and understanding are very good. However, the rate at which design communication skills are developed in Years 7 and 8 is slowed by weaknesses in pupils' freehand sketching ability when generating initial ideas or analysing solutions. More use needs to be made of Computer Aided Design to improve this aspect of pupils' work.
90. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers expect pupils to work hard and pupils respond accordingly. Lessons are characterised by thoughtful planning, very good organisation with appropriate intellectual challenge that promote very good learning and achievement. Questioning and interventions by teachers are generally very effective, but more needs to be done to challenge the thinking of higher attaining pupils. This would help to raise standards even further. Good marking provides pupils with clear feedback on the strengths and weaknesses in their work.
91. Full responsibility for subject leadership is in the process of being transferred to the fairly recently appointed head of department. Leadership during this period is satisfactory with key curriculum responsibilities clearly understood. The subject area is well managed and organised efficiently, reflecting good management practice. The close attention paid to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning provides the subject leader with a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. However, there is a need to tackle some weaknesses in staffing in resistant materials with greater urgency. Technical staff provide very good workshop support but routine support in food technology is inadequate. Overall progress since the last inspection is good. New specialist accommodation allows a broad and enriched curriculum to be taught more efficiently. Pupils are keen and work with enthusiasm in welcoming teaching environments.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

A small sample of drama lessons was seen during the inspection. Drama is part of the Years 7 to 9 curriculum and two groups are currently following the subject as a GCSE option. Results in 2003 were very good, with all candidates achieving grades in the A* to C range. The teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory. There is good support for written work and though the standard of pupils' practical work was variable, it was clear that over time, pupils' awareness of the disciplines of drama is successfully consolidated.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Standards achieved are high at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent.
- Some groups are very large for a practical subject.

Commentary

92. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show standards to be well above average and above those recorded in 2002. These standards represent very good achievement when standards on entry to the school are taken into account. GCSE examination results, at the end of Year 11, were also well above average and above those obtained in 2002. Again, these results constitute very good achievement.
93. Work seen during the inspection is consistent with teachers' assessment and the examination results, and shows very good achievement in all years. From Years 7 to 9, pupils develop a wide range of skills across a number of creative activities. Drawing and painting from observation is a particular strength and pupils acquire a good understanding of contemporary art. These strengths develop further in Years 10 and 11. At this later stage, pupils show developing confidence and a very good capacity for working and thinking independently in their project work. Pupils in all years make effective use of computers in the development of their ideas.
94. The quality of teaching is very good and promotes very good learning. Lessons are carefully prepared and imaginatively planned. Supervision of lessons is energetic and carried out at a good pace. A strong feature of the teaching is the quality of individual tuition. This is sensitive to individual pupils' needs and sustains good progress across the different levels of pupils' artistic talents. References are continually made to subject specific terminology, and pupils' numerical skills are applied effectively when measuring and scaling work. Homework is set regularly and used well to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. Assessment is used well to set targets and monitor pupils' progress through the school. Pupils respond well to the high level of challenge in the teaching and work with a high level of commitment and a clear sense of purpose. Excellent behaviour and a very productive working atmosphere reinforce their progress in lessons.
95. The department is well led and the quality of management is good. Teachers work effectively as a team and show a shared sense of enthusiasm and interest in the continuing development of the department. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to visit galleries and museums. Good displays of artwork are mounted in the department and around the school generally. The high standards noted at the last inspection have been sustained.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The determination of the head of department to provide many and varied opportunities for all pupils to participate in worthwhile music making.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory and having an adverse impact on the breadth of curriculum available to pupils in Years 7 to 9.
- Many pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and standards are high.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils help to support very good learning.

Commentary

96. Teachers' assessments show that at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the attainment of the large majority of pupils was well above average at Level 6 and above. The proportion of pupils attaining A* to C grades in the GCSE examination was also well above average. More pupils were entered for this examination than in the previous year with a larger number achieving A* and A grades.
97. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are above national expectations and often better. When the varied musical experiences of pupils before entering the school are taken into account, standards at the end of Year 9 represent very good achievement. Standards in Years 10 to 11 are well above expectations and these also represent very good achievement.
98. Analysis of pupils' work and the examination results demonstrate that teaching is normally very good in all years. However, as two of the present music staff are on long-term absence, much of the teaching at the time of the inspection was being carried out by temporary teachers. The quality of teaching and learning, although good, was not as high as is usual in the department. In most lessons, enthusiastic teaching and a very good variety of activities ensured that pupils enjoyed their music making and very good learning took place. Teachers use a scheme of work devised by the head of department as a basis for lesson planning and this ensures that pupils of all musical abilities receive an appropriate level of challenge. Very good relationships between staff and pupils, together with the pupils' positive attitudes to the subject contribute well to standards and achievement. However, in a few lessons there were not enough opportunities for pupils to evaluate the compositions performed to the class and in the one unsatisfactory lesson, a large majority of pupils were disengaged for a large part of the lesson.
99. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. Since the last inspection the issues raised have been thoroughly tackled. Staff have attended singing courses with a view to improving pupils' singing, the choice of examination board has changed, and more structured departmental meetings take place. These include critical reviews of practice and results. The assessment system has been refined to include target setting and is now very good. The accommodation is unsatisfactory as the main classrooms are cramped and prevent pupils in Years 7 to 9 accessing ICT as an integral part of the lesson. Over 300 pupils receive instrumental lessons and there is an extensive list of regular extra-curricular activities in which a similar number of pupils and students participate. After school GCSE classes are held for pupils in Years 9 and 10 who wish to sit the examination early.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and well above average in GCSE examinations because of the good teaching.
- Pupils are provided with very good additional achievement opportunities through the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered.
- Procedures for assessing and recording pupils' achievements are good although not enough use is made of the information to plan teaching and learning.
- A good range of sports is covered but not enough time is given to some areas of activity.

Commentary

100. Consistent with the results obtained in recent years, the 2003 GCSE examination results were well above average. Because pupils were engaged in mock GCSE examinations during the period of the inspection, it is not possible to make a judgement about the standards achieved by all pupils at the end of Year 11. A small amount of written GCSE work was scrutinised, which indicated very good knowledge of the theoretical aspects of the course. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils in Year 10 are achieving well and standards are well above course expectations.
101. The 2003 Year 9 teachers' assessments show standards of attainment to be well above average, as they have been in previous years. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm these standards but did not confirm the very high numbers of pupils judged as exceeding the national expectation. This is mainly because the pupils' ability to analyse and evaluate is not of the same high standard as their performance. Additionally pupils have not achieved the same high standards in dance and gymnastics as in games, although they are in line with the national expectation. This is because less time is given to these areas of activity.
102. Pupils are achieving well. They develop their skills and apply them appropriately to new situations. For example, they transfer their gymnastics skills well to trampolining and their awareness of positioning and space, developed through games, when new activities such as volleyball are introduced. Older pupils develop a good understanding of the components of fitness and are beginning to devise simple training programmes. All pupils have a good knowledge about the games they play so that by Year 11 they are confident and competent games players and many use this knowledge to help and support younger pupils. They are improving their observational and analytical skills but across all age groups these skills are not as high as they might be.
103. The quality of teaching is good and pupils are learning well. Nearly all lessons observed were good and some teaching was very good. Teachers give a good explanation about the work to be covered and recap well on what has been covered in previous lessons. Consequently pupils know what is expected of them, they respond quickly and organise themselves well. In a few lessons the teacher is explicit about what students should achieve by the end of the lesson and this helps both the teacher and pupils assess progress at the end of the lesson. For example, in a Year 10 GCSE theory lesson, the objective to know the flow of blood through the heart and lungs was constantly referred to and checked in different ways throughout the lesson so that both the teacher and pupils could assess what had been learned. More generally learning outcomes for the lesson are not specific enough. Where pupils are given structured opportunities to evaluate and analyse performance, for example in a Year 7 netball lesson and Year 9 girls' trampoline lesson, pupils respond well and show that they are capable of engaging in self and peer evaluation.

104. The leadership and management of the subject are good. A clear direction for the subject is well established. This is based on high expectations and enthusiasm for the subject, and shared by all members of the department. Not enough use is being made of assessment information to plan improvements in teaching and learning and these are important areas for development. There is a good understanding of where improvements are needed as shown in the department development plan. The department and pupils have worked hard to minimize disruption to learning, with the extensive building works taking place. Extra-curricular provision is very good, providing well for all pupils and extension opportunities for more able pupils. This has been recognised by the award of the national Sportsmark to the school. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the good standards of attainment and teaching have been maintained.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Two Year 10 business studies lessons were sampled. Teaching and learning were very good. A range of appropriately challenging activities was used to stimulate pupils' interest and develop learning. Pupils made good gains in learning about the processes of setting up a small business and, in particular, developing an understanding of the importance of cash flow to a business.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision for PSHE is **excellent**.

Commentary

105. The present co-ordinator has been in position for just over one year and in that time has devised a comprehensive scheme of work, which more than adequately covers statutory requirements as well as meeting the pupils' needs. PSHE is taught by a small number of teachers to all pupils in Years 7 to 11. In an attempt to ensure consistency of delivery, the co-ordinator has collated a series of specific lesson plans to provide a foundation for each lesson which must be prepared according to the needs of the individual classes. Each module has both a staff and a pupil's evaluation sheet and these are used as the basis for regular meetings to evaluate the previous module and plan for the next. Scrutiny of the pupils' returns reveal that they value highly the content of the modules as it gives them the opportunity to develop discussions within a friendly environment without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. Effective use is made of a variety of external speakers to cover topics such as sex education and substance misuse. Pupils welcome the opportunity to evaluate and challenge real facts. Teachers use a variety of strategies to deliver the subject including the construction of effective displays, which adorn the corridors. The scheme of work is a credit to the co-ordinator and the team who teach it have evaluated and refined the subject so that it is now a strength of the school.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching.
- Pupils are provided with very good opportunities to enhance their civic skills.
- The quality of leadership is very good and provides a clear vision for the subject.
- The curriculum is well planned in all subjects, although have a few yet to fully implement these plans.
- The procedures for assessing and recording pupils' achievements are not yet fully implemented.

Commentary

106. Whilst the school's assessment systems in citizenship are not yet at the stage where it is possible to demonstrate the standards attained in the subject, it is clear from pupils' work that they are achieving very well. By the end of Year 9, pupils are confidently contributing to debates, as seen in a Year 9 history lesson that focused on Britain's progress since the industrial revolution. In English lessons pupils showed that they are able to express their ideas fluently in writing and have an understanding of the techniques of persuasion. In a religious education, younger pupils show that they are well aware of the moral decisions that responsible citizens are required to make. By the end of Year 11, pupils are able to organise events and take responsibility for themselves and others. In geography they are well informed and have a very strong understanding of sustainable development and Third World issues. Pupils develop a good understanding of representative democracy and the electoral system through elections to the school council. The school also has two pupils who have been elected to represent the Wirral at the UK Youth Parliament. There are numerous examples of older pupils giving support to the community successfully. For example older pupils who are following the Junior Sports Leader Course coach both in local primary schools and younger pupils in the school. The involvement with the local community is recognised by the achievement of the Wirral Civic Award and the Duke of Lancaster Award.
107. The citizenship programme is very well planned with all subjects contributing to the schemes of work. The programme also draws on numerous opportunities for community involvement. Many examples of good teaching of citizenship were seen during the inspection week particularly in English, religious education, history, geography, and PSHE. In the best lessons, teachers make explicit where citizenship issues are being covered and this helps pupils to recognize and value the subject. As a result of the very good training provided by the subject co-ordinator the majority of staff are confident and willing to tackle citizenship in their teaching.
108. The co-ordinator for citizenship provides very good leadership. She has an outstanding vision for the subject and has worked with colleagues to audit provision train staff and produce excellent documentation. She is well aware of the need to further develop the tracking and assessment systems and has produced a very good development plan.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 14 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 (the latest date for which national comparative data is 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
Biology	9	89	82	11	33	35.6	33.2
Chemistry	8	100	85	25	37	40.0	35.2
English language	5	100	92	60	38	38.0	35.7
English literature	5	100	94	60	38	52.0	38.9
French	7	100	85	29	35	40.0	34.9
General studies	7	100	79	29	26	34.3	30.0
Mathematics	18	83	74	33	34	33.3	31.3
Psychology	21	91	83	5	32	29.0	33.6

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	8	88	97	13	52	62.5	87.8
Biology	34	100	93	53	39	89.4	76.3
Business studies	25	100	97	28	36	81.6	78.4
Chemistry	20	100	95	80	49	100.0	95.1
English language	48	100	99	71	37	96.7	80.8
English literature	21	100	98	57	44	98.1	84.7
French	8	100	96	50	46	77.5	83.2
Design and technology	8	100	96	50	46	77.5	83.2
General studies	111	100	91	41	30	85.0	70.5
Geography	18	100	97	61	47	90.0	85.3
German	13	100	97	31	44	84.6	82.3
Government and politics	14	100	n/a	64	n/a	n/a	n/a
History	27	100	97	59	43	96.3	82.6
Mathematics	11	90	95	54	56	87.3	88.3
Music	5	100	n/a	80	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economics	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	n/a	n/a
Psychology	7	100	n/a	14	n/a	n/a	n/a

Physics	7	100	95	71	50	102.9	84.6
Religious studies	22	100	97	32	44	84.5	82.8
Sociology	18	100	96	22	41	76.7	80.4
Spanish	20	100	96	55	47	96.0	83.4
Theatre studies	8	100	99	0	44	57.5	84.6
Physical education	6	100	96	67	39	106.7	80.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature, English language, French and German were inspected in detail and Spanish was sampled. Results in Spanish in 2002 were above average. These high standards were sustained in 2003. In the lesson observed, Year 13 students made very good progress in response to very good teaching.

English literature

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-level examinations are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Very good teaching is underpinned by excellent subject command and high expectations and encourages students to become informed, critical and discriminating readers.
- Students' excellent attitudes contribute significantly to the progress they make. They enjoy the high level of intellectual debate and challenge.
- There is very good use of performance data to identify areas for improvement.

Commentary

109. Results in the A-level examinations in 2002 were well above average and improved even further in 2003 with the proportion of students achieving Grades A and B increasing from 57 per cent to 65 per cent, which compares very favourably with the 2002 national average of 44 per cent. Achievement is very good with students gaining on average about a grade higher than the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results.
110. During the inspection the work seen in students' files and in lessons fully reflects these high standards. Students rise to the very high expectations of their teachers with intellectual and creative vigour. They enjoy and respond enthusiastically to the cut and thrust of debate and the way in which they are encouraged to develop their own ideas and opinions about the texts they study. As one student studying Penelope Lively's Booker Prize winning novel *Moon Tiger* remarked, 'There is no truth, only our interpretation of it'. This observation is typical of students' thoughtful approach to their studies. Their written work is characterised by analytical and incisive comment, judicious use of supporting evidence and clear, sophisticated use of language.
111. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers constantly challenge students, using their own excellent knowledge and enthusiasm to question, extend and deepen students' understanding. They enrich lessons with references to a wide range of texts, to the social, historical and philosophical context within which the text was written and with a consideration of the ways in which the reader's own experiences and circumstances affect interpretation. The discussions generated by this approach contribute significantly to students' moral and cultural development. During the lessons observed, students explored racism in *Othello*, moral courage and the search for identity in *Jane Eyre* and *The Color Purple*, and truth and reality,

the treatment of the dying and original sin in *Moon Tiger*. This gives some idea of the rich diet offered in the literature curriculum.

112. Leadership and management are excellent and focused clearly on the maintenance of high standards. For example, there has been a rigorous response to the lower results achieved in the 2003 AS examinations. Analysis of performance data has led to some scripts being remarked, others being bought back from the examining board so that marking can be scrutinised, retakes being made available in January and a workshop with the chief examiner organised for Year 12 students. Since the last inspection A-level results have improved and the department has adopted a more systematised approach to teaching to such an extent that teaching is consistently very good.

English language

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because of the rigorous, systematic, well-structured and challenging teaching.
- Students' excellent attitudes and commitment to high standards are significant factors in their achievements.
- Outstanding leadership has resulted in consistently very good teaching across the department.
- There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

Commentary

113. Results in the A-level examinations in 2002 were well above average and although the proportion of students gaining Grades A and B fell in 2003 from 71 per cent to 58.5 per cent, this compares very favourably with the 2002 national figure of 37 per cent. In addition, students continued to achieve very well, gaining on average well over a grade higher than those predicted by their performance in GCSE examinations. Standards have been maintained at this high level for the last six years.
114. These standards are reflected in the work seen in lessons and in students' files. Students in Year 12 are already conversant with a new subject terminology and with frameworks for the systematic study of language. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students were able to identify the variations in lexis, grammar, audience and tone and describe how these contributed towards the range in the level of formality in three very different accounts of the same incident. In a second, students made rapid gains in their understanding of how to write a linguistic commentary on a piece of their own original writing. In a Year 13 lesson students demonstrated a confident and sophisticated ability to use their knowledge of language as affected by gender and social class to analyse a 1920's children's story. Many students produce research projects of an impressive quality. In one particularly good example an Iranian student compared the speech patterns in the interactions with adults of the children of one bilingual and one monolingual family.
115. Students attain these high standards because of the very good, energetic, focused and knowledgeable teaching. Teachers are passionate about their subject and this enthusiasm is infectious. Students in their turn become fascinated by language variation and enjoy the intellectual challenge inherent in the analysis and evaluation of the spoken and the written word. Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships and students are fulsome in their praise of teachers' commitment and the level of support, both in and out of the classroom.
116. The outstanding leadership of the head of department has brought about very good improvement since the last inspection and teachers who have been at the school for some years testify to her boundless energy and the way in which she has brought a clarity and

cohesion to the subject. She and others continue to extend their own levels of scholarship and use these to support new, less experienced teachers so that they also can develop similar

competence and confidence. Not surprisingly, this successful department has increased the number of students studying the subject from 20 in 1998 to the current 54 in Year 13 and 74 in Year 12, half of the whole year group.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

117. Students have very good language and literacy skills, which contribute to the high standards they achieve. All students in the sixth form gained a higher grade in GCSE English in Year 11, the vast majority at Grades A* to B. The school continues to develop these skills through the induction course at Bangor University where study skills form an important element of the programme and through the core studies programme in Year 12. During this course all students participate at some point in the talking magazine project, creating, writing, recording and editing a magazine contribution to the local community Talking Newspaper for visually impaired people. All teachers insist on the use of subject terminology and in most subjects there are good opportunities for discussion and presentations.

Modern foreign languages

French

Provision in French is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A-level and AS level are well above average, with an improving trend.
- Students achieve very well. A significant number exceed targets.
- Most teaching and learning is very good or excellent, enthusing students and enabling them to become confident language users.
- Excellent leadership and management ensure progression through prescribed topics and a commitment to students' welfare and progress.
- Students benefit from excellent resources, including an effective foreign language assistant.

Commentary

118. Results at A-level in 2002 were close to average. In 2003 there was significant improvement, with more candidates entered, and almost half gaining grade A. All students met their targets and many exceeded them. AS level results in 2003 also improved, with over half of candidates gaining grade A, and all achieving at least grade C. At both levels this represents very good achievement. Inspection evidence confirms that students are working to high standards. In Year 12, they build rapidly on high GCSE grades, extending the range and complexity of their oral and written work. They use a good range of tenses in speaking about drugs and writing about smoking, within the topic of healthy living. Most feel confident enough to volunteer answers because they spend time learning vocabulary and are beginning to research topics for themselves. In Year 13, most students apply complex language in discussing issues in class, and in building and defending arguments in extended written work, for example on transport problems and political systems. They write in various styles to produce accounts, reports and analyses, for example on health issues and in their literary study. Nearly all writing is very accurate, with odd careless errors the main differentiating feature between very good and outstanding writing.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and sometimes excellent. Teachers use French consistently, and expect students to do likewise, so that listening and speaking skills are well developed. The best lessons feature excellent use of resources, such as the

interactive whiteboard and the foreign language assistant. In a Year 13 lesson about racism, students had to voice their reactions to a joke on a postcard, then heard the foreign language assistant recounting her experiences in her home town, and recent events in Paris, before being questioned to ensure comprehension. Such lessons extend students' topic and linguistic knowledge through very challenging activities in a realistic and interesting context. Students have excellent attitudes and appreciate the efforts of staff to direct them into independent learning, especially through homework, which requires them to use Internet to find their own information. Marking is thorough, well linked to examination criteria, and indicates teachers' caring approach to individual progress through extensive helpful comment, including examples of good quality language. Plans are in hand to provide students with individual review time.

120. Leadership and management for French are excellent. Results are analysed in depth to see where further improvements can be made, and schemes of work are amended as a result. Teaching is shared to ensure that teachers effectively apply their strengths. Each student has a weekly conversation lesson with the French assistant, and most make use of periodicals and magazines in the library to keep abreast of current events in France. Their work is enriched by attendance at special courses at local universities. Some provide help for younger pupils having difficulties with language learning. The achievement of specialist languages college status has undoubtedly had a beneficial impact on standards and provision, so that there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

German

Provision in German is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards seen are well above average, indicating significant improvement.
- Students achieve very well. In Year 13, they understand and apply very complex language.
- Teaching is always very good or excellent. Teachers' enthusiasm motivates students well.
- Students have excellent attitudes and work hard to improve.
- Excellent leadership and management ensure that students benefit from a rich range of learning experiences.
- Excellent resources, including a foreign language assistant, support learning very well.

Commentary

121. Results at A-level in 2002 were average, with similar results in 2003. More than half of candidates gained grades A or B at AS level in 2003, indicating strong improvement. In lessons and work seen, this trend of improvement is very clear, as students in both years are now achieving very well and many reach high standards in all skills. Despite a late start to the term, students in Year 12 have made tremendous progress in acquiring new language. They have moved on from detailed descriptive writing to begin to build arguments on topics such as personal freedom. In oral work, they produce complex language to discuss aspects of education in a simulation of an OFSTED inspection, with very good intonation and pronunciation. In Year 13, students write extensively on challenging topics. They use Internet to extend their factual knowledge, enabling them to talk and write confidently, for example, about political systems, racism, immigrant workers and the European Union. Nine weeks into the A-level course, most students understand and can use the most sophisticated language, for example to manipulate word order in conditional sentences. They work hard to increase their knowledge of vocabulary from the start of Year 12, so that comprehension skills are very well developed.
122. Teaching and learning are consistently very good, and sometimes excellent. Both teachers and students use German in all lessons, and English is not tolerated. Consequently, listening and speaking skills improve rapidly. There is very good pace and a sense of enjoyment in

learning. This stems from teachers' enthusiasm for their subject, and the pleasure they take in using excellent resources. They use new technology particularly effectively, emphasizing the visual aspect of learning by skilful use of Powerpoint presentations and the interactive whiteboard to make lessons more active and interesting for students. Tasks are relentlessly challenging, so that high expectations underpin rapid progress. Teachers are aware that not all students are high-flyers, and devote extra time, in lessons and in marking, to improving the confidence and standards of the few girls who need this level of support. The foreign language assistant provides excellent additional support. In a Year 13 lesson, she improved the quality of students' oral work on health issues by adding current colloquial expressions to the language used by the teacher. Students enjoy learning through imaginative and active tasks, and collaborate really well in pair and group work, prompting and correcting each other. Many produce complex language from memory with impressive intonation, pronunciation and confidence. Homework provides regular opportunities to work independently, for example to use Internet to research their personal topic.

123. Leadership and management for German are excellent. The head of department is passionate about his subject and disseminates his expertise with ICT effectively to improve the teaching of colleagues. Results are analysed carefully to identify strengths and weaknesses, as part of very good self-evaluation procedures. Consequently, provision for an aspect of the AS course has been strengthened, and there are plans for individual review sessions. Each student receives a weekly conversation lesson with the German assistant. They benefit from opportunities to attend special courses at local universities. One girl has spent time abroad after winning a prestigious award from the British Council. Students are looking forward to a visit to Berlin in conjunction with the art and history departments. With the impact of new accommodation and excellent resources since the achievement of specialist languages college status, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection, with good capacity for further improvement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching is rigorous and leads to very good learning.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The variety of student's learning approaches is too narrow.

Commentary

124. In 2002 A-level results were average but improved significantly in 2003 when two thirds of candidates gained Grades A and B, well above the 2002 national average, and every student achieved at least a pass grade. In relation to their GCSE results, students' achievement was very good. Retention rates are high with the majority of students continuing with their studies in mathematics in Year 13.
125. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average with all students achieving well. Students take a real pride in their work and organise their notes methodically. Students in Year 12 build effectively on their GCSE experience and cope well with the demands of the AS-level course. Those students following the further mathematics course are deepening their knowledge and experience because they are challenged in their thinking about mathematical concepts, for example, in the use of discrete random variables to model situations.

126. Students use computers and graphical calculators to consolidate their understanding of algebraic equations and their curves. In one lesson Year 12 students made impressive progress with their understanding of volumes generated by rotating curves because of inspirational teaching that captivated their interest.
127. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. This, together with students' attitudes to learning, leads to very good achievement. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and the requirements of the various courses are high. This very good teaching is underpinned by the careful attention that is paid to the teaching of mathematical principles. As a result students are able to make very good progress and develop their mathematical knowledge systematically and soundly. However, students are not adequately encouraged to increase their learning approaches through more open-ended tasks and independent research. Teachers do not yet challenge students enough about the methods used, why these work, or, if not, why not! Students are well informed of their progress through the regular and thorough marking of their work and discussion in class. Helpful comments identify where improvements are needed.
128. The very good leadership and management of mathematics are major factors in promoting high standards. Teachers are enthusiastic and work very effectively as a team. Ideas and resources are shared. Their considerable experience and expertise is used well to plan and deliver stimulating lessons. The analysis of examination results provides most valuable information on individual student performance. The improvement since the last inspection is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

129. Students' mathematical knowledge and skills are generally sufficient for the needs of their chosen courses. However, the absence of any application of mathematics programme for all students means that the common principles and approaches to using mathematics are not systematically developed and improved. In some subjects attention is given to extending mathematical application. In English language, students are taught to find the lexical density and ratio in the analysis of texts, and in the financial module of the Business Education course the effective application of spreadsheets is taught.

SCIENCE

The inspection focused on biology, but chemistry and physics were also sampled. A-level chemistry and physics results in 2002, were well above average. Although results in 2003 were not as good as those in 2002 in either subject, students' achievement was as expected. In the two chemistry lessons observed, students worked well and were eager to learn. Teaching was very good. Teaching in physics was at least satisfactory.

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is often very good.
- Achievement is very good.
- Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students.

Commentary

130. The GCE A-level examination results in 2002 were well above average. A-level results in 2003 were much better than those achieved in 2002. All students who took the examination gained at least a pass grade. The proportion gaining the higher Grades A and B was well above

average when compared with other schools. In relation to their GCSE results, students' performance was better than expected.

131. Whilst current standards are above expectations on the whole, those of higher-attaining students are well above expectations. Year 13 students are achieving better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. Students make very good progress as a result of good and very good teaching. In a very good biology lesson, for example, students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the structure and operation of muscle tissue. Higher-attaining students, in particular, recall previous knowledge very well and use it effectively to develop further understanding. Written work is very well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom.
132. Students in Year 12, approaching their first modular examination at AS level, are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of biology. Written work is well developed and students make very good progress in developing their skills of independent learning. Lower-attaining students, however, have greater difficulty in coping with the demands of advanced work and are more dependent upon support from their teachers. Nevertheless, as a result of good teaching, all are making good progress and the achievement of all students is at least as expected in comparison with prior attainment.
133. Teaching is at least good and often very good. The principal features of teaching are the use of very good subject knowledge by teachers, good, well-focused planning and a range of methods that maintain interest and engender learning. Homework is set which extends class-work and often takes the form of structured questions. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is variable. At best, it is thorough and provides valuable information for students on how to improve their performance, but sometimes marking is not diagnostic and does not provide enough information about how students can improve.
134. Students' learning is good and often very good. They respond very well to challenge, work hard and show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. Most undertake independent work maturely, can extract information and make their own notes on, for example, osmosis. Lower-attaining students are less confident. They have greater difficulty with independent research and rely more on their teachers for information.
135. Leadership and management in the biology department are very good. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Assessment procedures are very good and used very well to track the progress of students and to guide teaching and learning. The range of learning support materials available in the form of advanced equipment and standard textbooks is adequate. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

Information and communication technology

Information and communication technology is not offered at advanced level, although a small number of students join a class at the Wirral Boys' Grammar School.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

Provision for ICT across the curriculum is **very good**.

136. In Year 12 all students follow a term's programme within the core studies course, which builds on ICT skills learned in Years 7 to 9. It focuses on advanced applications of ICT, such as databases and spreadsheets, in real world contexts. The good teaching of this course provides for students to work at their own pace and their own level of expertise. ICT is well used in other subjects in the independent research that students undertake using the Internet and in the presentation of projects and course work.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history, religious education and sociology were inspected in detail. Psychology and government and politics were sampled. One Year 12 psychology lesson was observed. Student numbers are rising. Teaching and learning were very good, and students are developing very good independent learning skills. Standards are well above average. One Year 13 government and politics lesson was observed. Teaching and learning were very good and students demonstrated a very good understanding of measures taken to tackle poverty after the Second World War. Standards are well above average.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers maintain high expectations which students work hard to meet.
- Lessons are well planned to develop independent learning.
- Assessment is very good and teachers provide students with a good knowledge of what they need to do to improve their work.

Commentary

137. The results in the 2002 A-level examinations were well above average with over 60 per cent of students gaining Grades A or B compared with 40 per cent nationally. In 2003, entries were too few to make comment meaningful. In relation to their GCSE results, students' achievement was good.
138. The standard of work seen during the inspection is very good. Students show good knowledge and understanding in both class and written work and develop very good skills of selection, analysis, synthesis and communication. Their independent note taking is strong and they have a good geographical vocabulary. A Year 13 lesson focused on why South Korea has become a newly industrialised country that is both a place of origin and a host to Trans National Corporations. Students were quickly able to identify key factors from a range of sources and could articulate these in detail and with confidence. In relation to prior attainment, students at A-level perform in line with expectations. The achievement of the most able students is good and the standards they achieve are very high.
139. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers make effective use of strong subject expertise, very high expectations and very good questioning techniques to establish and build on what students already know. Lessons are well planned with a variety of activities providing opportunities for individual, paired and group work. Students enjoy lessons, particularly the most active lessons, for example when they engaged in a mock public enquiry following research and preparation on the construction of the Newbury by-pass. It is in the sixth form that the department's commitment to enquiry-based learning comes to fruition as students take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning, wider reading and note taking. For example, in extended written work on tropical storms a student had been provided with the opportunity to demonstrate her skills and as a result had been able to show a mastery of the topic beyond A-level standard covering classification, tracking, and the relationship between wealth and impact management. Students have target grades and regularly receive feedback based on A-level examination marking which leaves them feeling confident about the standards at which they are working. The best lessons have a strong sense of purpose and maintain good pace throughout.
140. Leadership and management of sixth form provision are satisfactory. They have been affected by the continued absence of the head of department since February 2003 but the impact of this on students has been reduced through the strengthening of staffing provision in the autumn

term. The curriculum is enriched by fieldwork opportunities in Barmouth and Cwm Idwal. The organisation of the department is strong, aims of lessons are shared with students and ICT is often used in research and in lessons.

141. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Resources have been developed and sixth form students are now well supported with eight key textbooks they can take home as background reading material. Assessment methods are being developed and students make effective use of ICT in their written work.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject benefits from very good leadership and very effective management, which contribute to examination results that are consistently well above average.
- Students' excellent attitudes are a significant element in their very good learning, and their active engagement in lessons develops their independence well.
- Some students do not read widely enough outside their textbooks and study notes.

Commentary

142. Results in the 2002 A-level examination were well above average, and almost 60 per cent of students gained A or B grades, compared with 43 per cent nationally. These high standards were maintained in 2003, and the proportion achieving the highest grades rose slightly.
143. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, standards are well above expectations and achievement is very good. Students compile large volumes of accurately completed work, revealing a very thorough and detailed knowledge and understanding of the selected topics. In high quality extended writing, they make very good use of supporting evidence and appropriate subject specific terminology, in responding to challenges such as "Assess the roles of Asquith and Lloyd George as political leaders". They regularly use computers for research and communication purposes. In frequent classroom discussions on historical issues, they articulate their views clearly and convincingly, and demonstrate very good debating skills and considerable independence in their learning.
144. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The detailed and high quality study notes provided for students reflect teachers' considerable subject expertise, although some students are almost entirely dependent on these and their textbooks, and do not read widely enough around the subject. Students' excellent attitudes are evident in their enthusiastic discussions of historical topics, and in their very well organized and extensively annotated and highlighted files. Examination and essay writing skills are regularly practised and students' individual learning needs are very well met because teachers give freely and regularly of their time. Students are highly appreciative of this, and of the volume of feedback that they receive from marking and feel very well known and supported by their teachers.
145. Leadership and management in history are very good, as demonstrated by the energetic pursuit of improved quality of teaching or the detailed analysis of examination performance, which are both long established departmental practices. Despite the frequent and protracted disruption associated with the building developments, good improvement has been sustained since the last inspection.

Religious studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and contributes very well to students' achievement.
- Excellent working relationships between teachers and students make an outstanding contribution to achievement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The example set by the head of department is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Commentary

146. A-level results in 2002 were close to average, but with fewer students gaining the higher Grades A or B than nationally. This proportion fell further in 2003, although all students gained at least a pass grade. Achievement was well below that expected, with students gaining on average about three-quarters of a grade lower than predicted by their performance at GCSE.
147. Higher standards were seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection, because of the improvements in teaching promoted by the head of department. Standards in Year 12 are above average and students demonstrate good understanding of philosophical and religious concepts and an ability to produce well-structured and balanced arguments.
148. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers challenge students to analyse material and form judgements about a range of biblical and philosophical issues. This enables students to demonstrate their ability to use religious and philosophical language very well. The teacher's excellent use of discussion and constant challenge contribute very well to students' ability to think independently. Students use their skills of analysis and evaluation to draw out ideas and to make distinctions between opinions, beliefs and facts. Discussion enables students to deepen their learning and respect the views of others. Teachers have high expectations of students and, as a consequence, students have equally high expectations of themselves. They learn well and make good progress. Assessment of students' work is very good. The procedures provide a very clear basis for assessing what students know and understand. Students are very clear about the standards they are reaching and the helpful comments on their work show clearly what they need to do to improve.
149. Curriculum leadership and management are very good with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of the department approaches the task with enthusiasm, commitment and a very clear view of the needs of the students.
150. The examination syllabus and the teaching provide very good opportunities for the spiritual development of students. Students have a respect for the beliefs of others and have a clear understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and form judgements that enable them to develop insights. Since the last inspection, the number of students taking religious studies in the sixth form has increased. The department makes a substantial contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are regularly involved in individual and group research, which develops their independent learning skills well.
- Students are very well supported by the structured learning approach and the frequent monitoring and review of their progress.
- Examination results are improving and students achieve well.

Commentary

151. All candidates have obtained pass grades at A-level in the past two years, although in 2002 the proportion achieving Grades A or B was only half the national average. In 2003, the equivalent figure rose significantly and over half of the candidates obtained the top grades.
152. Inspection evidence indicates that students are working at the expected standards for this stage in the course. This reflects good achievement as attainment on entry to the course in Year 12 is below average. Students' very positive attitudes make a significant contribution to the standards they achieve. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological terms and studies, and can explore issues through different sociological perspectives. Some students' current knowledge and understanding of theory and methods are less secure. In essays on the role of religion, they pursue lines of argument well and support their findings by quoting appropriate sociological studies. They complete substantial files of personal work and make good use of computers for individual research. There are some weaknesses in written English, especially by lower-attaining students, and a more widespread reluctance to read around the subject in sufficient breadth. In Year 12, higher-attaining students have a clear understanding of Marxism, whereas lower-attaining students confuse conflict and consensus approaches and have difficulty in identifying that both are structuralist perspectives.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students learn well because the tutorial pack compiled by the teacher offers them a clearly structured means of understanding and managing the variety of concepts, approaches and materials that the study of a new discipline involves. Students accept considerable responsibility for their own learning, as they have to undertake individual research to acquire sufficient contemporary data to illustrate the underlying theoretical structures. Students' understanding is secured because the teacher uses question and answer well in challenging them to justify their conclusions. Self-review is regularly used to monitor and assess progress towards target grades and although students always receive feedback on their work, comments on their essays are not always detailed enough to indicate how they might improve.
154. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Standards have clearly risen in recent years as a result of a much more active approach to teaching and learning and improvement since the last inspection has been good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students show a good grasp of design practice.
- Teaching is very good and reflects a secure subject command.
- Students are keen to engage in design activity and take pride in their work.
- Assessment is thorough and is well used to guide and support students.
- Experience of a wider range of modern materials and equipment is encouraged.
- Computer aided design and manufacture is not sufficiently well embedded in all aspects of design and make activity.

Commentary

155. Two courses in this curriculum area were inspected, GCE advanced courses in product design with a materials or textiles bias. The two courses are reported under the single heading, design and technology.
156. A-level results in 2002 were above average with half of the eight students gaining Grades A or B. Results improved further in 2003 with 64 per cent obtaining the higher grades. This represents satisfactory achievement with students generally gaining grades in line with those predicted by their performance at GCSE.
157. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflect these results. In lessons students are keen to apply design principles to a range of challenging design problems. They make good gains in the acquisition of further knowledge, understanding and a range of making skills. Students systematically analyse and evaluate design and products against design criteria; they demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and values of consumers. Standards of communication are good but computer aided design is not yet used systematically to present information in a coherent style to further improve the quality of summaries and final presentations. Likewise, experience of modelling equipment and materials are not used enough during design brief development.
158. Students collaborate well in group work, show initiative and good independent learning skills. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and promote an impressive development of personal views and student interpretation of moral and environmental issues. Students in both years are well motivated, are engrossed in their work and take pride in final outcomes.
159. The majority of teaching is very good, and never less than good. Work is thoughtfully planned and delivered with pace and challenge. Student progress is closely monitored and assessed thoroughly; clear guidance is given on how to improve. Teaching strategies as yet do not reflect different learning styles or strategies that promote greater exploration and innovation.
160. Leadership is sound and day-to-day management is well informed and well planned. This reflects a total commitment to consolidate and continue to improve standards. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection developing purpose built accommodation. This now provides the basis for new examination courses to be taught more inventively.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Music and theatre studies were sampled during the inspection while art and design was inspected in depth. Standards and achievement in music are very good although numbers are small. In the lessons observed, students demonstrated good analysis of a range of music, from Mozart to 20th century jazz. Music students are joined by a large proportion of the sixth form who participate in a wide range of extra curricular activities, many of which result in concerts in the community and often involve raising money for charity. Standards in theatre studies are below average and achievement below the expected levels. In the lesson observed, Year 12 students collaborated well to devise a piece of theatre for their practical assessment.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- A-level results have improved markedly in the most recent year.
- Students' attitudes are excellent and contribute significantly to their achievement.
- There is a shortage of storage space for large-scale work.

Commentary

161. Results in A-level examinations in 2003 represent very good achievement and a marked improvement on those of the previous year when they were well below average. A feature of the most recent results was the high proportion of very high grades obtained by students. Results at AS level have also improved significantly over the same period.
162. Work seen during the inspection is consistent with these results. Students have well developed skills in drawing and composition and show a very good level of creative self-confidence. They are able to develop their ideas imaginatively and independently. Students are thoughtful in their approach to individual projects and show a good knowledge of major figures and movements in art. This knowledge and understanding informs their creative work in a positive way.
163. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. A major strength is the tolerance and encouragement of students' exploration of individual ideas. Students are expected to think for themselves and to take a large measure of responsibility for their own progress. Though the teachers show a high level of subject expertise and enthusiasm, they do not impose their ideas on students, although the level of challenge is high. This is appreciated by students who, when interviewed, cited this factor as an important element in their choice of sixth form course.
164. The quality of learning is greatly influenced by the nature of student response to the teaching. Students show a mature level of serious commitment and a desire to engage with important issues in art and education. They see their work in art as having a bearing upon other subjects in respect of the development of thinking.
165. Accommodation and resources for the sixth form are largely satisfactory, but the shortage of storage space impacts on the amount of large scale work that can be undertaken. Since the previous inspection, the structure of sixth form courses has changed significantly. High standards, however, have been maintained.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes and value the subject.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- Standards are high and students achieve very well.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in the curriculum.
- Apart from A level there are no other curriculum opportunities in physical education for students.

Commentary

166. A-level results in 2002 were well above average and have been at these levels for some years. These high standards were maintained in 2003, with an increase in the percentage of students gaining Grades A and B. Students are achieving very well in the subject and achieve grades above those predicted by prior attainment.
167. Standards of work seen by students in both Years 12 and 13 are good. Students have a good knowledge of muscle anatomy, and the effects of muscle actions at the joints. They make good use of the knowledge they have from GCSE, and are able to extend this knowledge to the higher level needed for this advanced course. As well as being able to identify more detailed muscle anatomy, students understand types of contraction, such as isometric and isotonic and can relate this to sporting activities. Students have a good understanding of different components of fitness. They are able to describe in detail different types of fitness tests to measure aerobic capacity. They are also able to identify specific fitness components required for their own sports, which include gymnastics, basketball and netball. In their preparation of portfolios, students make extensive use of ICT, which enhances the presentation of their work.
168. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which enables them to give in depth explanations of the theory of physical education. Teachers use this knowledge to challenge students to think by using focused questioning. Lessons are very well prepared with a range of practical tasks, which reinforce the theory effectively, although little use is made of ICT in teaching. Teachers have high expectations of students, and there is a very good and purposeful working ethos in lessons. Students have very positive attitudes, which is a major contribution to the significant progress they make, leading to very good achievement.
169. Leadership and management are good. The A-level courses are well organised, and all teachers in the department share in the teaching of the subject. There is good data analysis, so that teachers know the capabilities of their students, and therefore can set them realistic targets. Students are given considerable support in the subject, with a variety of well prepared work books and notes, which allow students to study independently, and prepare for lessons.
170. There are some opportunities for students to take part in extra- curricular activities in school teams, as well as helping with the coaching of younger pupils. Standards in netball are exceptionally high, with the senior team being placed fifth in the national schools championships in 2003. However there are few opportunities within the curriculum for students to take part in recreational activities or courses other than advanced level ones.

BUSINESS

Business studies was inspected in depth. Economics was sampled. Entries are often too low for meaningful comparisons with national statistics to be made. Analyses of performance show that students achieve well. In the lesson observed students made reasonable progress in understanding how business equilibrium can be affected by changes in supply and demand.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently above average.
- Students are highly motivated and this has a positive impact on learning.
- Students learn well because of their teacher's very good knowledge and guidance.
- There are not enough opportunities in lessons for independent learning.
- Links with local businesses to enhance the curriculum are under-developed.

Commentary

171. Examination results in A-level business studies were above average in 2002 and rose significantly in 2003 when 63 per cent of students gained Grades A or B based on their GCSE performance, students' achievement is as expected.
172. Standards observed in lessons and in students' work during the inspection are above average. Year 12 students show good understanding of the importance of cash flow to a business and in Year 13 students are making a good start to using critical path analysis for project management. Students benefit from the good support of their teacher who monitors progress and helps them improve their understanding. Students have positive attitudes, they are always attentive and sustain concentration, and this enhances their learning.
173. Teaching and learning are good and students benefit from their teacher's very good knowledge and effective use of increasingly challenging tasks to consolidate knowledge and aid understanding. However, students have little opportunity to take an independent or active role in managing their learning during lessons and they draw too heavily on their teacher's expertise when making their theoretical notes. Target setting and monitoring with the students is well established. Assessment takes place regularly, marking is used well to provide written feedback and work is discussed with each student. As a result, students improve the quality of written work with additional notes. Some students had a valuable opportunity to increase their business knowledge during the recent trip to Prague where they visited car and piano production companies. However not all students were involved and there are not enough links with local businesses and industries to provide similar contexts for learning.
174. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The experienced subject leader a clear direction, and is firmly committed to the success of the subject through the systematic review of standards within the department. Professional development is managed well through e-learning activities, but there are not enough planned meetings with other teachers in the department to share good practice and for monitoring. Good progress has been made since the last inspection with access to improved resources and ICT to support learning.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Core studies

Commentary

175. All students follow a programme of core studies during Years 12 and 13 and this was sampled during the inspection. The programme includes one term of ICT during which students build on their work in the main school, learning more advanced applications such as databases and spreadsheets. One term is devoted to the creation, recording and editing of a talking magazine to accompany the local talking newspaper tape for visually impaired people. This unit is designed to improve students' communication skills in addition to using their ICT skills.
176. In the summer term of Year 12, continuing into Year 13, students follow the A-level general studies course. The course offers opportunities to explore moral, religious, philosophical and social issues and to follow up a topic in depth for the course work essay. The mathematical and scientific skills required together with knowledge of a modern foreign language all help to ensure that students continue to follow a broad educational experience.

PART D: SUMMARY OF MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	2	2
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	2	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		1
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	1
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	1
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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