

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **SIR JOHN LAWES SCHOOL**

Harpenden, Hertfordshire

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117511

Headteacher: Mr S Fenton

Lead inspector: Mr D B Evans

Dates of inspection: 22 – 25 September 2003

Inspection number: 259178

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1040
School address:	Manland Way Harpenden Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL5 4QP
Telephone number:	01582 760043
Fax number:	01582 469793
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr A Read
Date of previous inspection:	2 March 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Sir John Lawes is an 11-19 comprehensive school serving a generally favourable socio-economic area of Harpenden and its surrounding villages. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. In September 2002 the school gained specialist Media Arts status. It is a Beacon School and has Investors in People accreditation. Two successive school achievement awards recognised the good progress made by students. Further accreditations include the Sportsmark award, the Artsmark Gold and, recently, the Basic Skills Quality Mark. It had 1040 pupils at the time of the inspection, which is above average for comprehensive schools. There are more boys than girls in most year groups. Attainment on entry to the school is above the national average. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or with English as an additional language. The number of students on the special educational needs register and the number with statements are broadly in line with the national average. The number of students who are admitted to, or leave the school, other than at normal times is low.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1049	Brian Evans	Lead inspector	
12682	Jim Griffin	Lay inspector	
19385	Martin Beale	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
1880	Garry Bignell	Team inspector	Special educational needs Modern foreign languages
28178	John Connor	Team inspector	French (sixth form)
15163	Eric Deeson	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form) Design and technology
31673	John Gwyer-Roberts	Team inspector	Music Music (sixth form) Media studies
32199	Ellen Hill	Team inspector	Mathematics
17474	Derek King	Team inspector	Art and design Art and design (sixth form) Citizenship
32266	Simon Lockwood	Team inspector	History History (sixth form)
12121	Jack Mallinson	Team inspector	English English (sixth form)
20825	Brian Ogden	Team inspector	Leisure and recreation
30563	Jacqueline Pentlow	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form)
32322	Alan Potter	Team inspector	Physics (sixth form) Science
31879	David Rhodes	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Information and communication technology (sixth form)
32122	Judith Straw	Team inspector	Religious education Religious education (sixth form)
30344	Stephen Walker	Team inspector	Geography Geography (sixth form)
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical education Physical education (sixth form)

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Sir John Lawes is an effective school and gives very good value for money.** It has a number of excellent features. GCSE examination standards are well above the national average. Overall, students achieve well because the teaching is good and students have good attitudes to learning. Teachers assess students' work constructively. The headteacher, supported well by governors and staff, has a clear vision for the future and management strategies are focused well on meeting the needs of all students.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Boys achieve well; girls achieve very well.
- Teachers have excellent opportunities to develop their teaching and leadership skills through an imaginative staff development programme.
- A high proportion of students participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including media arts, music, drama and sport.
- The school has excellent links with parents.
- It has had a successful first year as a specialist media arts school.
- Overall, the curriculum provision is very good but there is a need to review the vocational offer in the sixth form to meet the needs of growing numbers.

### HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1998. It has made very good progress in responding to the key issues identified in the last report. Its major investment in information and technology (ICT) is enabling students to acquire well above average ICT skills. Standards in religious education are above average because strong leadership and management have led to good teaching and positive attitudes to the subject from students. The requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus are now met. Good practice in assessing students' progress is now more consistent across subjects and provides a sound basis for identifying individual needs.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	B
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	n/a	B	B	

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9. The 2003 GCSE examination results are not yet officially validated in terms of national and similar school comparisons.*

**Students achieve well throughout the school.** Overall, their attainment on entry to the school is above average. By the end of Year 11, the overall trend over the past five years in GCSE examination results has consistently been well above the national average. Students of all abilities make above average progress through Years 10 and 11 compared with schools with similar intakes. In 2003, all students achieved at least one GCSE A\*-G grade. Students' application of ICT skills in Years 10 and 11 is very good. A higher than average proportion of students achieved the A\* and A grades at GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science. The school met its local education authority's target for GCSE average points score per student in 2003. Inspection evidence confirms that overall standards remain well above average. In the 2000 and 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9, English, mathematics and science test results dipped well below those of previous

years and the overall trend was below the national average. However, the 2003 test results were well above average.

Imaginative approaches to disseminating good practice in teaching and learning practice among teachers have led to higher student achievement. Inspection evidence shows that standards are well above average and that students are achieving well. Girls achieve better than boys, although the gap is narrowing. Students with special educational needs make good progress and the school is in the early stages of implementing an extended programme for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students.

GCE A level results have been above average over the past three years. Over half the subject entries were awarded A and B grades in 2003. GCE AS level results in 2003 were in line with the national average. Inspection evidence shows that standards are well above average and students are achieving well.

**Students' personal qualities including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good.** There is a strong, positive ethos in the school. Students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are very good. Attendance is well above the national average.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good.**

Innovative approaches which encourage all teachers to take lead roles in sharing good classroom practice characterise the improving quality of teaching in the school. These are having a very positive impact on students' motivation, which enables them to achieve well. Lesson plans emphasise the matching of tasks and activities to students' attainment levels. In Years 7 to 11 nearly all teaching is at least satisfactory and a very high proportion is good, including many excellent or very good lessons. In the sixth form, teaching and learning are very good. Key skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT are taught well and are important factors in students' ability to sustain concentration and support one other in their learning. Resources are good. The library is popular and contributes well to students' learning. The curriculum, including an extensive extra-curricular programme, is very good and structured well to meet the needs of all students. Assessment data are used effectively by teachers. The school cares very well for its students and gives them very good support and guidance. The school works successfully with parents.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The leadership of the headteacher in his first two years at the school has been excellent in working towards the school aim of ensuring the highest possible quality of education for all students. The senior management team, including two newly appointed deputies, works well as a team and seeks to enable every member of staff to take a leadership role in raising standards. Management systems are very good and include a strong emphasis on effective self-evaluation procedures. They are well defined and the coherent development plan covers all aspects and subjects of the school. The governors carry out their financial and legal responsibilities efficiently and contribute to the further development of the school in an informed and supportive way.

## **PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents' views on the main school and on the sixth form are very positive. They believe that the school is well run and that their sons and daughters make good progress. Similarly, students in their questionnaire responses affirmed that they were taught well and were always expected to do their best.



## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Standards are high across the school and, therefore, there are no areas of weakness significant enough to be a requirement for specific issues to be covered by a governors' action plan in the main school or in the sixth form. However, there are a number of minor issues in the main report for consideration by governors, headteacher and staff for further improving the quality of education.

These include,

- continuing to implement strategies to further raise boys' achievement;
- reviewing the range of vocational courses in the sixth form.

## SIR JOHN LAWES SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has grown rapidly in the last three years and is now close to the average size nationally, with 191 students on roll. The school has a wide curriculum offer and has a common sixth form timetable with two other 11-19 schools in Harpenden, and a few students follow A level courses in more than their home sixth form.

## OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is an effective sixth form which gives very good value for money.** Numbers of students have increased significantly since the last inspection. Standards are well above average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership and management are very good and based on sound consultative procedures with students, staff and parents. Every effort is made to meet the needs of all students. Management systems which monitor students' progress are very good. Course retention rates are very high.

### The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve well because teaching and learning and the assessment of students' work are very good.
- There is an excellent ethos in the sixth form, both in terms of students' attitudes to work and in their willingness to take responsibility more widely in the school.
- The new sixth form centre provides a positive environment for students' learning and research.
- Independent learning skills are strong in a number of subjects but need to be developed more consistently across all sixth form subjects.
- There is a very good range of AS and A level subjects on offer but the nature and scope of vocational courses need to be reviewed.

## 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	<b>Provision for English is very good.</b> Strengths include very good teaching and learning and high levels of achievement. <b>Provision for French is good.</b> Teaching and learning are good. Results are above average. Students' independent learning skills need further development.
Mathematics	<b>Provision for mathematics is very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good. Students achieve well.
Science	<b>Provision for biology is good.</b> Standards are rising. Teaching and learning are good. Leadership and management in the subject need clarification. <b>Provision for physics is good.</b> Teaching and learning are generally

	good and students achieve well but the range of activities in some lessons needs to be reviewed.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	<b>Provision for ICT is very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve well. Very few girls study ICT post-16.
Humanities	<p><b>Provision for geography is good.</b> Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good.</p> <p><b>Provision for history is good.</b> Students achieve standards in line with expectations and teaching and learning are good.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p><b>Provision for art is good.</b> Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good. A few students show weak observational skills. Fewer boys than girls opt for the A level course.</p> <p><b>Provision for music is excellent.</b> The subject has sustained the high levels of success noted in the last inspection because teaching and learning are consistently very good.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<p><b>Provision for leisure and recreation is very good.</b> The range of teaching and learning resources are very good and enable students to achieve well.</p> <p><b>Provision for business studies is satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students' independent learning skills are not well developed.</p> <p><b>Provision for physical education is very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve high.</p>

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*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 very good advice, guidance and support. Assessment procedures and the way assessment is used to monitor and support students are very good. Personal support is very good for students, highlighting particular strengths and weaknesses.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

**Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.** The head of sixth and her tutors work well as a team to meet the needs of individual students and their success is reflected in the increasing numbers of students staying to follow post-16 courses. Financial arrangements are very good. Monitoring of teaching is very good. The wide range of enrichment activities is effective in developing students' social and academic skills.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students report very positively on their work and feel they have been able to follow appropriate courses and career patterns. A particular strength is the easy access that the students have to teachers if they experience difficulties or need to talk through an issue that concerns them. A high proportion of students believe that the sixth form is well run and that they are consulted across a range of whole-school issues.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

**Students achieve well and standards are well above average.** Overall, girls make very good progress and boys make good progress in all years.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are taught well and have contributed particularly to the recent marked improvement in standards in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average.
- Sixth form standards are well above average.

#### Commentary

#### *Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002*

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35 (34)	33 (33)
mathematics	39 (37)	35 (34)
science	36 (35)	33 (33)

*There were 161 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

1. Comparative national figures for 2003 are not yet available but the average points score per student in national tests at the end of Year 9 results shows a significant improvement over those in 2001 and 2002, when the overall trend in standards was below that nationally. The school's strategies for addressing relative weaknesses in boys' achievement, especially in writing skills, are bearing fruit. English teachers have imaginative approaches for further raising the proportion of students who achieve the higher National Curriculum levels. Similarly, mathematics and science test results in 2003 also improved. In all three core subjects there is a range of initiatives, including the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning, booster classes, projects on the gifted and talented and a greater range of learning resources.
2. The special educational needs register includes many more boys than girls. The school's analysis shows that boys with special educational needs have a lower value-added score than girls at GCSE. The learning support faculty plays a full part in developing strategies to support boys' learning. Monitoring of performance by the special educational needs co-ordinator assists the early deployment of intervention by support staff. Taking account of individual education plans (IEP) reviews, the achievement of specific targets, value-added analysis and the quality of in-class support during observed lessons, most students with special educational needs make good progress and achieve at least as well as their peers, given their starting points and degree of learning difficulties.

#### *Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002*

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	62 (74)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (99)	91 (91)

Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best 8 subjects)	46.1	39.8

*There were 161 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Since the last inspection the proportion of students who achieve five or more GCSE A\* to C grades has consistently been well above the national average. The overall trend in GCSE examination results has been broadly in line with that nationally. In 2003 the school again achieved their GCSE targets agreed with the local education authority. The school is on course to meet its targets in the current school year. The average points score per student was above the average for schools with a similar intake. Inspection evidence shows that standards remain high and that students of all attainment levels continue to achieve well. Boys and girls achieve well where teaching and learning strategies are adapted to both their needs as, for example, in English literature, design and technology, geography, media studies and religious education. Strong curriculum leadership in mathematics has enhanced students' achievement. Successful strategies include elements such 'fast-track' classes, providing higher levels of challenge in mathematical concepts and low attainers in Year 10 being entered for GCSE at foundation level. Standards in science have improved since the last inspection because there has been an effective focus on investigative skills and a wider range of teaching and learning strategies.

## **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	98	89
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	54	43
Average point score per pupil	17.8	17.4

*There were 60 pupils in the year group.*

4. The average points score achieved by students entered for the A, AS and VCE examinations was above average in 2001 and 2002. Results in 2003 continue this trend. There were significantly more female than male candidates and in 2002 female average points scores were well above average and for male candidates they were average. Inspection evidence shows that standards are well above average. Students achieve well, particularly since the GCSE grades of a significant number starting A level courses average around the B to C grades. Inspection evidence for the subjects inspected in depth shows that students achieve very highly in A level English, mathematics, ICT and AVCE leisure and recreation. Provision for music is excellent. Standards in these and other subjects are underpinned by good teaching and positive attitudes to learning by students.

## **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

**Students' personal qualities are very well developed, with particularly strong features in their moral, social and cultural development.**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students show a very good attitude towards school and their work, behave very well, form very good relationships and their personal development is very good.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are very good.

- The excellent partnership with parents and students' personal development at school make a significant contribution to these very positive attitudes and values.

## Commentary

- Students are proud of their school. They are very positive about their teachers and hold them in high regard. The modern facilities, including the theatre studio, computer network, clubs and sports all contribute significantly to students' very positive attitude to school. In lessons, students listen well and show a very good level of interest, concentration and determination to complete set tasks. Their enthusiasm for practical activities is clearly evident in design and technology, art and design, drama, physical education and ICT lessons. The very good and reliable behaviour of nearly all students is an important element in the prevailing positive atmosphere for learning. A calm, social atmosphere prevails in the dining-hall. Rare instances of bullying and anti-social behaviour are dealt with firmly and effectively. There were no permanent exclusions in the previous school year, whilst the level of fixed-term exclusions is below that found nationally. Exclusions are now increasingly rare after a slight upturn with the appointment of the new headteacher. Harmonious relationships among students, irrespective of ethnic background, gender or attainment, are a very positive feature of the school. Parents' and students' responses to the survey fully support this very positive picture.
- In three of the past four years attendance has been in the 94 to 96 per cent range, which is well above the national average. Unauthorised absence is consistently below the national average. The table below provides absence data for the latest complete reporting year, when the attendance was above the national average at 92.5 per cent. Sixth form attendance and punctuality are very good. The school's measures to combat absence, including first day contact, are very good. Nearly all parents take their responsibilities seriously in relation to contacting the school in the event of absence. This is confirmed by the low level of unauthorised absence. Students' punctuality is good. Nearly all students routinely arrive on time and get promptly to their lessons, throughout the school day.

### ***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.2	School data	0.3
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.*

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

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

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
961	34	0
12	0	0
4	0	0
5	0	0
3	0	0
4	0	0
3	0	0
3	0	0

Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	8	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	1	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	22	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

7. Spiritual development is fostered in daily assemblies which are well-prepared and thoughtful and usually enhanced by music at the beginning and end. The 'Thoughts for the Week' are displayed in all classrooms and used by most tutors as the starting point for class discussions during form time. Spiritual development is fostered in other areas of the curriculum. For example, in history, students think deeply about the feelings of those present at the opening of the Great War Memorial and the impact of the slave trade.
8. Provision for moral and social development is very good. Students respond positively to a clear code of conduct. They treat others with respect and take responsibility for themselves and others. Most subjects of the curriculum explore moral issues - for example, in media studies students consider media responsibilities and the portrayal of stereotypes; there are modules on the impact of ICT on society as well as many other opportunities to discuss moral issues in the humanities subjects, citizenship, the arts and sciences.
9. Students learn to understand their own culture and prepare well for a multicultural society. For example, in geography, there are opportunities to understand European and African culture. Appreciation of the art, drama, music and creativity of people of different cultures is encouraged and the key beliefs and practices of the six main world faiths are studied in religious education. In history, students learn to appreciate how other people, in other times and cultures might have felt.

### **Sixth form**

10. Sixth form students value the fact that their views are taken into account by adults in the school. Relationships among students and between students and staff are excellent. Students make good use of the wide range of facilities and equipment in their sixth-form base. A group of sixth form spoke of being 'one big family', and were very impressed by the support provided by teachers.
11. Students' personal development is very good. As individuals and in groups their responses are strikingly articulate, thoughtful and clear. Opportunities for taking responsibility are very effectively encouraged and taken by students. Year 13 prefects support pastoral staff and act as guides on parents' evenings and as reading mentors to Years 7 to 9 students, whilst a group of Year 12 house captains help organise sports days.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good.**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Teaching and learning and the quality of assessment of pupils' work are good. They are very good in the sixth form.**

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Opportunities for staff at all levels to lead on aspects of the teaching and learning development programme.
- Students respond positively to the high expectations set for them in their work.
- Assessment data are used for planning improvements in students' achievement.
- Innovative use of media and communication technologies raises standards.
- In a minority of lessons teachers' expectations of students' learning need to be higher.

## Commentary

12. The good teaching is the result of a series of initiatives introduced by the headteacher and senior staff which build on good practice within the school. For example, two teachers are leading on a project to share ideas among subjects on providing more coherent support across subjects for gifted and talented students. Collaboration weeks between subject areas are regularly designated, in which subject specialists share teaching and learning approaches which have been successful for them. Newly acquired status as a specialist media arts school has further broadened teachers' perspectives on the use of media technology. Students use the film studio to develop their communication skills and to make presentations on a number of issues. In subjects such as English, art and physical education, PowerPoint-based group presentations, built on individuals' research, are frequent features. The overall strategy for improving students' learning is increasingly successful over time and gives teachers a clear framework within which constantly to evaluate their teaching skills.
13. Students' learning is further enhanced by their willingness to respond positively to the high expectations set for them in their work. Marking is diagnostic and helps students' of all attainment levels to know what they must do to improve. Assessment data is carefully used to monitor students' progress and to identify relative weaknesses in achievement among subjects. The emphasis in the school development plan on teaching and learning has been a major factor in the significantly improved national test results in Year 9 in 2003.
14. Teachers are excellent role models and set high expectations for their students within a relaxed but purposeful learning environment. Students contribute a great deal to the success of many lessons, as they arrive ready to work and concentrate very hard. They are attentive, interested and are eager learners.
15. The table below highlights the fact that just over eight in every ten lessons observed during the inspection were graded as good or better. There were no significant differences in the proportion of good teaching in Years 7 to 11. Lessons that were satisfactory, and one unsatisfactory lesson, were characterised by low expectations or lack of pace and students thus made less progress. In good lessons, students made good progress and achieved well. In just under four in every ten lessons teaching was very good or excellent and students made much better than expected progress and achievement was very high. Good, sometimes very good, teaching was true of virtually all subjects.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 163 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (4%)	57 (35%)	71 (44%)	27 (17%)	1 (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. Percentages are rounded up and therefore may not add up to a hundred.*

16. All lesson plans identify the learning needs of students with special educational needs and the teaching strategies that will be used to meet them. Matching tasks and activities to students' prior attainment is a feature of the great majority of lessons seen. In-class support is generally well used throughout lessons, although it ranges in quality from satisfactory to very good. It is invariably better when teaching assistants are used during whole-class work as well as with individuals, pairs or groups. Teaching assistants get to know their assigned students well and progress through the school with them. Mentoring of students by teaching assistants is proving to be effective in enhancing their learning.



## **Sixth form**

17. Sixth form teaching and learning are very good, overall, with no unsatisfactory teaching. Lessons observed included a high proportion of very good or excellent lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and most students display considerable maturity in their approach to A level work. The ethos in the new sixth form block is impressive and there is a good positive 'buzz' that enhances their learning.
18. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which inspires confidence in students. Students' work is carefully and sensitively monitored both by subject teachers and by senior sixth form managers. Teachers' current priorities, in helping students to know how to study independently and encouraging learning as a two-way process, are enabling Year 12 students especially to become more effective learners. Students are aware that key skills and effective study skills play an important part in successful learning.

## **The curriculum**

Curriculum provision is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum provides a broad range of appropriate opportunities that encourage students' progress and achievement.
- Imaginative curriculum planning has created greater flexibility of choice for the students.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The high quality of accommodation and resources support the curriculum, although there is increasing pressure for space.
- Vocational courses could be further developed in the sixth form.

## **Commentary**

19. The new curriculum serves the majority of students well and reflects an innovative approach within the school's Beacon activities in line with its specialist media arts status. There is now greater flexibility so that subject choices are more suited to students' aptitudes and abilities. There is a broad and balanced curriculum in Years 7 to 9, with opportunities to start GCSE courses in Year 9 in design and technology, French, religious education and ICT. In Years 10 and 11 there is a good balance between core subjects and options. There are no requirements for students to take humanities, design and technology or modern foreign languages. Students can gain GCSE examination grades in ICT and religious education at the end of Year 10. Gifted students are given good opportunities to join 'fast track' groups in mathematics and languages when AS courses can be started in Year 11. Additional support classes are provided in literacy and numeracy for lower-attaining students. There is a coherent programme of personal, social and health education, including careers education.
20. Extra-curricular activities are a strength of the school and provide a variety of enrichment activities for the students. There is a high participation rate and some of the activities are run by the sixth form students. Year 7 students attend a residential visit and all Year 10 students have a work experience placement. There are regular residential trips that support subject studies in the upper school, such as the geography visit to Flatford Mill field centre in Suffolk. School visits are arranged on a faculty basis, including theatre visits and arts trips to galleries in London. The music department offers a range of activities, including the concert band, jazz club, choirs, chamber orchestra and the string group. A European music tour was arranged last year that involved the school concert band, jazz group and upper and lower choirs performing in St Marks in Venice. Participation in sport is high with a large number of teams as well as additional clubs such as gym and trampolining. The school's Beacon and media school status has enabled it to share its facilities and expertise effectively with other schools.

and the community. The school has its own well-produced website with details about the school and examples of students' work. The wide range of opportunities available at the school has enhanced learning and supported the positive ethos in the school.

21. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources meets the needs of the curriculum satisfactorily. Resources are good with an impressive range of ICT facilities to support the curriculum. Many teachers now have laptops and regularly use Power Point presentations as a natural part of teaching. The library contributes very well to students' learning and is well resourced with a large selection of books, ICT resources and study areas. Imaginative and proactive recruitment has ensured that there are sufficient specialist teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum. The number of support staff is satisfactory.

### **Sixth form**

22. The sixth form provides a good range of AS and A level courses and some subjects offered by the other consortium schools. Entry to courses is based on a minimum of five grades C or above at GCSE. The school offers three AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education) in business studies, information technology and leisure and recreation. The range of vocational courses is limited and the school needs to review the further development of these courses. Sixth form students are encouraged to organise enrichment activities for younger students and these have included clubs such as table tennis, public speaking, the school newspaper and chess club. The new sixth form accommodation has enhanced provision for students' learning. Resources and staff are good.

### **Care, guidance and support**

**Students' care, guidance and support are very good.**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Form tutors and other staff know the students well and provide very good support, advice and guidance for them.
- The school involves students in its work very successfully.

### **Commentary**

23. The formal policies and practices relating to health and safety and child protection are well considered and properly carried out. Tutors act quickly if a student is unhappy or under pressure and are careful to make sure that new arrivals are helped to settle in. Year 7 students stated in interview how well supported they felt, and it was evident that this made them want to do their best. The monitoring of students' personal and academic achievement is thorough and very effectively shared with students and parents. Where there are concerns, form tutors and other staff work very well with students and their parents to identify how these concerns can be overcome.
24. The school's involvement of students in its work is impressive. It has developed far beyond learning of their views and concerns through the school council. Their views have been sought about issues central to learning, such as how to improve boys' achievement, the school's learning charter and annual reports. In turn, their views are incorporated into the improvement plans related to these issues. They are also involved in staff appointment interviews and have been consulted about how the induction to Year 7 could be further improved.

## **Sixth form**

25. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance given to students are very good. Students are made clearly aware of the entry requirements during Year 11. Sixth form induction is comprehensive and very effective. For example, students take 'taster' AS level lessons after the GCSE examinations. 'Chances' graphs in relation to likely AS and A2 grades are shared with students. Students are also able to sample subjects for up to six weeks before coming to a final decision, if necessary. As a result, their choices are considered and realistic and the drop-out rate during the sixth form is very low. Progress reviews are very frequent, with an important emphasis on getting students to identify and work on key improvement areas. The careers education and guidance for future courses and career opportunities are good, overall. Students are very well supported in their preparation of personal statements for university entrance. A good range of software and literature is available to support students with their decisions about the choice of third level institutions.

## **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

**Partnership with parents is excellent. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. Links with the local community are good and make an effective contribution to students' development.**

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A very positive response to the work of the school by parents.
- The links between the school and its partner secondary schools are well developed.
- Local businesses and professional bodies contribute well to the school's activities.

## **Commentary**

26. The excellent partnership with parents makes an important contribution to students' academic and personal development. This is reflected in an exceptionally positive response to the inspection survey of parents' views. Only a tiny minority have any concerns on any of the survey questions. This is most unusual, especially in relation to homework and the quality of information on students' progress. Among the keys to this outstanding partnership are:
- the quality of materials provided to help support students' learning;
  - the range of methods used to hear parents' views;
  - the use of these views as an integral part of the school's self-evaluation;
  - the quick action taken to address any concerns.
27. When their children join school, all parents get an attractive booklet, 'How to help your child to learn', based on a range of modern learning techniques. Pamphlets on helping with reading, writing and spelling, together with tips on making the best use of ICT, are also provided. These materials are also on the impressive school website. As a result, students, from as early as Year 7, are helped practically and encouraged to learn independently, using a variety of media. The arrangements to hear and act on parents' views are excellent. All parents are consulted annually. As a result, homework arrangements and those related to information on students' progress have been refined. All parents are invited to join a series of parents' focus groups, which work with school staff on a diverse range of issues identified by the school or parents. The outcome from these discussions forms an integral part of the school's improvement and self-evaluation processes. The school has successfully encouraged parents to use e-mail as a means of contact and undertakes to make an initial response to all queries or concerns within 24 hours of receipt.
28. As part of its Beacon status, the school takes a leadership position in establishing and maintaining links with over 30 other schools, some of which are in very different educational settings. These links help to provide a smooth transition in students' learning between primary

and secondary school. Since gaining specialist school status in media arts the school has become a leader in sharing its expertise and provision with other schools and colleges. For example, the media arts department is currently writing a course on video making, for the local college.

29. Links with the community are good. The school plays its part as a resource for the local community, in terms of use of its substantial sports, music, drama and computer facilities, by a range of local groups. The media arts department is now a real resource for local film companies. The local branch of the Rotary Club provides volunteers who have mentoring and interview skills to support students. A local religious group supports elements of the religious and personal and social education curriculum.

### **Sixth form**

30. Parents' views on the sixth form are very positive. In the main, sixth form students are enthusiastic about what the school offers them. Most feel they are given a good level of responsibility and are treated as young adults. As part of its good links with two local secondary schools, there is some shared sixth form provision across a range of A level and AVCE courses. The media arts department has forged a wide range of community links. As a result, students in Years 9, 10 and 12 are creating a website for the local town, whilst the school hosts the visit of students from Harpenden's twin town in Germany.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are **very good**. The headteacher gives excellent leadership. The governing body provides very good service to the school.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school development plan is a working document which focuses the work of governors and managers effectively on improving the quality of education;
- School improvement projects are having an impact on standards and students' achievement;
- The school evaluates its performance well and takes action to address subsequent weaknesses.

### **Commentary**

31. In his first two years at the school, the headteacher has given excellent leadership and clear short-, medium- and long-term strategic planning. His vision of a high-achieving school which meets the needs of all students is shared by governors, staff and parents. A well-constructed school development plan is giving staff at all levels of responsibility the opportunity to improve their management skills and further raise standards.
32. The school's systems for reaching decisions, devolving responsibility and ensuring good communication are very good. The senior management group, including two newly appointed deputy headteachers and an advanced skills teacher, work well as a team and ensure that school policies are implemented. The quality of leadership and management in subject areas is generally very good. In science, the school has recognised that roles need to be clarified in the separate sciences and a new head of science will soon be appointed. In many curriculum areas every teacher, even those who are newly qualified, will have some aspect which they can take responsibility for, thus acquiring valuable experience. In the same way, heads of year delegate very effectively to form tutors, ensuring a high standard of pastoral care. Performance management systems are effective and supportive.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### **The headteacher's strategy for involving staff, students and parents at all levels to take up a leadership role is innovative and successful.**

School improvement groups are led by a range of colleagues including support staff, classroom teachers and senior leaders. Parents are involved in school leadership through, for instance, e-mail surveys and through regular parent focus groups that have led to policy changes in, for instance, the area of reporting to parents. Student leadership is well-developed to include a key role in the appointment of all teaching staff as well as the role of associate governor for two students. Teachers are involved in a wide range of leadership development courses, including a prestigious research associate with the National College for School Leadership. The impact of this is a renewed and embedded sense of corporate accountability, personal responsibility and empowerment. This reinforces the firm commitment to higher standards through self-evaluation and improvement through change.

33. The governing body brings a wide range of experience and expertise to the school. For example, the school's successful application to become a specialist media arts school involved extensive input from governors with appropriate expertise. The governors support the headmaster and staff well in extending the range of projects and initiatives which are proving beneficial to students' learning. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities. The governing body's procedures for strategic planning, monitoring the quality of education and financial management and control are very good.

### Financial information

#### ***Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003***

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,170,063	Balance from previous year	169,354
Total expenditure	4,120,204	Balance carried forward to the next	219,213
Expenditure per student	3,954		

34. The school bursar and finance officers are very efficient, use management information systems effectively and advise governors on the correct use of specific funds, such as those for students with special educational needs. Audit reports show good financial control. Governors apply the key principles of best value effectively for the benefit of staff and students and these are confirmed by the rising standards in the school. For example, the school's specialist media arts status was achieved through careful consultation with all parties and focused on further improving the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects. The carry-forward balance to allow for contingency spending is small in relation to the overall budget.
35. The learning support faculty is ably led and provision is very well managed. Recent developments have been impressive. Teachers take account of students' learning needs and students with special educational needs achieve well. The school maintains a strong drive to improve standards and continues to provide very good pastoral care and guidance for all its students. The school gives very good value for money and provides an effective education.

### Sixth form

36. The quality of leadership and management of the sixth form by senior managers is very good. There is a very good relationship between the sixth form and the main school. Overall, the leadership and management provided by subject leaders are effective.

37. All sixth form funding is strictly allocated for its purpose. The sixth form is cost-effective and does not draw resources from the main school. Course provision is determined by the students' choices, balanced by the stringent annual costing of individual courses to ensure that all are financially viable. The principles of best value are strictly applied in relation to all expenditure in accordance with practice in the school as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the close analysis of students' performance in external examinations in comparison with that in other schools.

### **Media Arts Specialist Status**

38. The school's Media Arts specialist status is now in its second year. New resources and facilities, as well as expert technical support staff, are now beginning to have a positive impact upon teaching and learning strategies throughout the school. The facilities and technical resources are impressive, creating an innovative and stimulating teaching environment for students.
39. The resources available, both for school and community use, include a new TV studio, cinema control room, video-editing suite and a music technology suite. These have been created with industry standards in mind to prepare students for working in the media industry.
40. Most students in the school have been able to participate in a number of curricular and extended curricular events. For example, the annual arts week provided students with an interesting range of activities, including computer animation and film making. All Year 12 students have participated in a film-making week culminating in an Oscar-style ceremony. Faculty days, using the available technologies, have included work with Year 7 on video production and with Year 8 on drug awareness.
41. Voluntary staff familiarisation and training have included reviewing the resources and analysing the enhanced teaching and learning methods that are now available. These have led to the music department incorporating media modules in Years 7 to 9 and facilitating both composing and performing work in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Work within the community has included projects with both primary and secondary schools.

# PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

## SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Quality of provision in English is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above national averages by the end of Years 9 and 11, particularly those of girls.
- Pupils achieve well in all years.
- Teaching and learning are very good, particularly in Years 10 to 11.
- The Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy is implemented imaginatively and well.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Strategies for improving boys' achievement are increasingly effective.

#### Commentary

42. Standards are well above national averages in all years. Standards in Key Stage 3 have improved since 2001, as confirmed in last summer's Year 9 national tests and in work seen during the inspection. Girls in 2002 performed at levels well above the national average, boys slightly below. Standards of all students are now rising, a judgement that takes into account work seen in class, as well as standardised test results in 2003, indicating good achievement, in line with those for mathematics and better than those for science. However, the proportion of students attaining National Curriculum levels 6 and above, although still higher than the national average, is lower than in mathematics and science.
43. Standards in Years 10 and 11 for both language and literature have been consistently well above the national average for boys and girls in recent years. However, the difference between boys' and the girls' results is greater than the difference nationally. Work seen in class indicates that boys' standards are rising. Grades of A\* and A are well above national averages, but the percentage of GCSE examination grades in the range D and E has increased. When judged against prior attainment in Year 6, boys and girls achieve well. This is confirmed by work seen during the inspection.
44. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, with some excellent lessons throughout the range. There are many strengths, most notably the clear structure given to all lessons, making imaginative use of the school's literacy strategy. Students know what to expect, and make good progress as a result. They are encouraged to learn through diligent and helpful marking, which tells them what standards they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Students also learn well by using ICT to research and redraft their work. Teachers are adept at using a range of devices to advance learning, such as the use of 'mind maps' seen to very good effect in a Year 11 lesson on *Great Expectations* (which the whole class had read during the summer holidays). The class all contributed ideas as to how aspects of the opening chapter could be related to visual images, and thus remembered more clearly. Students speak frequently and listen sensitively, learning well thereby. Those with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented make good progress.
45. Leadership and management are excellent. This derives from the sharing of responsibility throughout the department, and the pooling of ideas. All teachers give outstanding commitment, seen in their embracing of the latest initiatives, the updating of excellent

schemes of work, their use of assessment data, and the time they give to organising activities outside the classroom. These activities contribute impressively to moral, social and cultural development. Teachers engage in rigorous review of their achievements. Monitoring and evaluation are of a very high standard. As a result, all share the vision provided by the head of department and all contribute to its efficient administration. The development plan is well thought through. The need to improve the attainment of boys is given prominence and the many initiatives include Easter revision courses and a summer school.

46. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The high standards of 1998 have been maintained. Results in standardised tests at the end of Year 9 declined in 2000 and 2001, but rose again in 2002, and more sharply in 2003, particularly at level 5. This improvement was confirmed by work seen during the inspection. Standards in GCSE examinations, particularly among girls, have remained above the national average. Initiatives to improve the attainment of boys are already showing results in the classroom. The quality of teaching and learning has improved markedly: whereas previously a quarter of lessons were judged good or better the proportion is now five out of six.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

47. The National Literacy Strategy was revised in the summer of 2002. All departments are represented on the planning group set up to implement the policy. Since then the policy has concentrated on writing rather than speaking or reading, but the impact has been felt throughout the school. There is very good practice in all departments. All teachers understand what is required and, consequently, standards are rising. In humanities, for example, the policy is embedded in the schemes of work, and given a high priority. For every topic the key words are given to the students and their specialist meaning discussed. Skills in writing are fostered by writing frames and 'scaffolding'. Discussion takes place in every lesson. Teachers of ICT teach the skills of scanning, note-taking and summarising, as do those in mathematics and science. There is much guided discussion in art and physical education. Key words are displayed in all classrooms, and glossaries of specialist vocabulary given to students. The library is very well run. It offers support to all subjects, and has a very good impact on literacy across the whole school. Sixth formers help with reading of younger students. The school's teams perform well in public-speaking competitions.

### **Modern foreign languages**

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**. Lessons were observed in French, German and Spanish.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching results in effective learning.
- Strong faculty leadership and teamwork combine to raise standards.
- Students behave well and enjoy learning languages.
- Learning new words or structures should form a regular part of weekly homework tasks.

### **Commentary**

48. Past examination results have shown a downward trend and students, especially boys, have not achieved as well in languages as in their other subjects. Few students achieved the highest grades at GCSE. Students' standards by Years 9 and 11 are now in line with those expected nationally and their achievement is now satisfactory, overall - a judgement that takes into account the 2003 results as well as how well current students are doing. However, achievement looks set to improve and progress is more marked in recent work. The pace of students' learning is now good.



49. Standards have improved since the last inspection when they were only close to national averages. The improvement results from strong curriculum leadership. The newly appointed head of faculty has succeeded in developing a shared vision for improvement of teaching, and has introduced a number of strategies to bring greater consistency to teachers' approaches. There are now clear guidelines for behaviour in lessons, a more rigorous programme of teaching in all languages, and assessment methods which enable students' work to be directly matched against National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Students also evaluate their achievement of learning objectives noted each lesson in their books. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, overall, and good since the start of this school year.
50. Language skills are developed well during individual lessons and over time. The focus on oral work and reinforcement through repetition is clearly leading to effective learning of new vocabulary and structures. Students in Year 7 learning French for the first time, and those in Years 8 and 9 who have been learning a second language, have made substantial headway over a short period. Students enjoy speaking to each other in pairs and by the end of Year 9 can sustain realistic short conversations about themselves, their interests, school subjects and daily routines. They can also recognise and use the past tense when referring to what they and others have done.
51. Teachers are helped in targeting the work by the clear assessments they make of what students can do. This is also true of Years 10 and 11 where in addition the students are very well prepared in their understanding of what the examinations will demand – especially at higher grades. Work is well marked, with comments that praise, challenge and set out the next steps for improvement. Students generally take note of these comments and show a willingness to succeed.
52. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Able linguists use the foreign language widely during lessons and teach with confidence, drawn from good subject knowledge. In one very good Year 9 lesson, for example, students holding words written on cards were asked to arrange and then re-arrange themselves in the correct formation in front of the class according to the rules of word order in German. This simple but effective technique demonstrated very graphically a point of grammar which is commonly misunderstood.
53. Teachers do not always exploit opportunities to extend and reinforce learning as they arise – for example, by getting students to use words instead of letters or numbers when doing matching-type exercises or offering alternative expressions that enrich students' language repertoire. Learning new words or structures do not form a regular part of weekly homework tasks.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The management and educational leadership of the department are very good.
  - Very good attention is given to raising standards at all levels.
  - Good use is made of assessment data to guide planning and set targets.
  - Resources are used well to enrich teaching methods and stimulates learning.
  - Students have positive attitudes to mathematics.
- 
54. The mathematics department is very well led and managed rigorously. Teachers are committed to raising standards across all key stages. The head of department has a clear vision with high expectations, focused on students' achievement. Strategic planning, clear priorities and thorough monitoring are effective in bringing about improvements in students' progress.

55. The National Numeracy Strategy for improving standards in Key Stage 3 is well-embedded within the department. This is beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and learning. Steady improvements have been made since the last inspection, after a decline in standards in 2001. In 2002, results in national tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9 were well above the national averages for level 5 and above and further improvements have been made in 2003. These results compare favourably with similar schools. This has been achieved through strong curriculum leadership. Strategies including self-assessment, booster classes, target-setting, staff development and improved resources have helped to improve achievement within the department. Boys and girls are achieving at a similar rate. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average, as exemplified by the number of students gaining A\* to C grades at GCSE. Students' achievement is good, overall, and measures are in place to improve standards of achievement even further. In Year 10 a 'fast-track' group has been formed, creating significant challenges in developing high level mathematical concepts. In the same year group, low achieving students are entered for GCSE at foundation level in mathematics, thus securing an early qualification. This has motivated students to improve their standards of achievement and a large proportion of this group are expected to enter the intermediate level at GCSE in 2004.
56. Assessment data is used very well throughout the department. Students are aware of their current working level in mathematics, as well as their target level. This data is displayed clearly in their exercise books and in their student planners, allowing parents to follow their progress. This information is used by teachers to pitch their teaching at a sufficiently challenging level to promote learning and stimulate interest in the subject. All teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. This results in interesting lessons, with a variety of different teaching methods. Good questioning techniques allow students to develop their understanding and demonstrate their knowledge. In a Year 8 lesson the teacher asked the group to write an equivalent fraction to three-quarters on their whiteboard. Without hesitation one student wrote two hundred and twenty-five over three hundred. This shows a clear understanding of fraction equivalence as well as quick mental manipulation. In a Year 7 lesson the students were asked to use a mathematical operation to make 24 and one student gave the answer 'four factorial', showing an advanced knowledge of mathematics.
57. The department makes good use of resources to improve teaching and learning. This is particularly evident during the start of each lesson when students are issued with resource packs of relevant materials to be used within the lesson. Learning is stimulated through the regular and efficient use of ICT. Graphic calculators, laptops and overhead projectors are regularly used within the department, offering a variety of teaching approaches. Good displays can be seen in all teaching rooms, as well as in the corridors. This helps to motivate the students and promote the subject.
58. Teaching and learning are good. Students show an enthusiasm to learn. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and teachers have a strong sense of care for and interest in their students. All teachers offer individual help and further support is given through booster classes and homework support groups. Students are keen to learn, are polite, share equipment well and support and encourage each other. All students work well together and learning is consistently good across all year groups. Progress since the last inspection is good, following the decline in standards in 2001.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

59. In science, good use is made of numeracy when interpreting and manipulating data and in one lesson observed numeracy was used effectively to develop an understanding of the food chain. In geography, there are many opportunities, identified in schemes of work, for the development of numeracy skills. Particular reference is made to graphical construction and interpretation, map skills and reading thermometers in fieldwork. In history, a Year 9 group use their numeracy skills to collate data, while researching a project on war memorials.

However, not all departments have planned the development of numeracy as well. A whole-school in-service training session is planned to promote numeracy across the curriculum and an audit has already taken place to support this training.

## SCIENCE

The provision for science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in both key stages and in each of the subject areas: biology, chemistry and physics.
- The Key Stage 3 science strategy has been introduced well in lessons and the assessment and marking of students' work are particularly strong.
- Resources in science are very good; both students and staff use computers very effectively in the laboratory.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work and make good progress as a result.

### Commentary

60. After declining in recent years relative to national trends the results of national tests in Year 9 show a dramatic improvement in 2003. This is evidence that the measures taken by the science department to improve teaching and assessment techniques are having the intended effect. It is impressive that when students are questioned about their level of work, and what they must do to improve, they are able to give mature responses. This constitutes a firm foundation on which the department can build in Key Stage 4. In GCSE examinations, girls and boys do well compared with national figures, with girls performing particularly well. The department is taking measures to improve boys' results but there is still some way to go. The department was criticised for a lack of investigative practical work at the time of the last report. The situation is now much improved, with focused teaching enabling students to achieve good standards.
61. Teaching is generally good, with some examples of very good practice. This is particularly so in the use of computers. Teachers show a readiness to use data logging equipment, a 'flexicam' and an interactive whiteboard, and students gain confidence in their own use of computers from this. For example, a lower ability Year 8 group gained good understanding of food webs in a session using the whiteboard. Teachers use a wide variety of techniques in their lessons. This is particularly important in the long double lessons when students' interest can decline. A good example is a chemistry lesson in which a lively role-play session, on the location of a chemical factory, enabled students to develop their understanding and debating skills. Students with special educational needs make good progress; in lessons, for example, a teacher, working co-operatively with the support assistant, covered a challenging topic on acids and alkalis. Marking is uniformly very good, giving students positive advice on how to improve. If the department continues to evaluate its teaching methods it should be well placed to build on the recent gains at Key Stage 3.
62. Leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the department and, with the backing of senior management, has already introduced measures which are likely to result in enhanced achievement by students. The department benefits from the good support of five part-time technicians and its accommodation is good, although the use of a mobile is not ideal. Resources in the department are very good and enable students to gain plenty of productive practical experience.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The quality of provision in ICT is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain well above average standards and achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Overall, teaching and learning are very good.
- Assessment is very helpful to students – they understand exactly what they have to do to improve and their performance is carefully tracked.
- ICT resources and accommodation are good.

### Commentary

63. The 2003 teacher assessments of students in Year 9 give high levels of attainment compared with national averages. These levels are an improvement on assessments in preceding years and represent significant value added, even though students' levels of attainment on entry are well above average. Results in GCSE examinations have been above national averages. About two-thirds of the students in Year 11 are studying GCSE ICT. The remaining students are following an unaccredited ICT course designed to enable them to acquire transferable ICT skills.
64. Standards by the end of Year 9, overall, are well above national averages with all students following a challenging and stimulating course. ICT is integrated into the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and by the end of Year 9 students have acquired a high level of ICT capability. Students use desktop publishing and presentational software to communicate information and reach appropriate levels of achievement. They successfully model financial information using spreadsheets and also manipulate graphical images from a variety of sources. Students are familiar with the Internet, usually making good use of the available material, and have a keen awareness of the impact of ICT on society.
65. Standards in Year 11 are well above national expectations. Students demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of basic database design when they link records for customers, suppliers and products. Their work is well presented and organised, and most annotate their work to indicate a critical awareness of what they have achieved and what they can do to improve. Students on the non-accredited course of study apply, as appropriate, the concepts and techniques of using ICT to respond to, control and automate events. For example, one small group of students successfully built a model buggy and developed a program which controlled the model in response to a sensor placed on it. Students understand and are able to use a variety of techniques - for example, data-flow diagrams to analyse the use made of ICT in organisations. Students' progress is carefully monitored and there is clear mapping of all sections in the ICT scheme of work on to other departments.
66. Teaching and learning are very good, overall. Teachers have a good level of knowledge that underpins their work. Lesson aims are clearly stated and displayed, and students are clear about what is expected of them. Teachers have high expectations and are firm with students and ensure that they are involved in lessons. As a consequence, students are well-motivated, and enjoy their ICT lessons. Homework is consistently well used; relevant work is set and marked regularly.
67. Leadership and management are very good. Departmental documentation is thorough and the arrangements for monitoring all students' progress in ICT, both in discrete lessons and in other subjects, are very sound. Two highly capable technical support staff provide essential maintenance and keep the extensive school-wide network of approximately 200 computers functioning fairly smoothly. ICT facilities are widely distributed throughout the school - students and teachers alike are delighted with the level of access that this arrangement ensures. There

is a clear Internet access policy. There has been very good progress since the last inspection: standards have been raised and National Curriculum requirements are now met. Sufficient resources (hardware and software) are now available and all students make good progress in the acquisition of ICT skills. Indeed, the aim of the school that all students become autonomous users of ICT before they reach Key Stage 4 has almost been realised. With some justification the school claims that, 'All teachers are teachers of ICT'.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

68. The cross-curricular provision for ICT is very good. Students learn ICT skills in all subjects and put these skills to good use in their learning of all subjects. Teachers in all departments have a high level of capability in the use of ICT and use ICT extensively in their teaching. For example, software is used in physical education that enables video recordings of students' performance to be analysed, giving clear indications for improvement. There is an effective whole-school scheme of work and procedures to monitor and assess students' performance are all in place. The emphasis on transferable skills and on students becoming autonomous users of ICT by the end of Key Stage 3 is having a positive effect on all the learning in the school. As the last inspection report made ICT an issue for improvement this represents enormous progress.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average and show evidence of value added to prior attainment.
  - Strategies to improve boys' achievement have been introduced successfully in lessons.
  - Assessment information is used effectively to track progress and help students to improve their work.
  - The head of department provides very good leadership that has encouraged improvements in standards.
  - Successful learning and teaching strategies are not yet shared widely enough within the department.
  - The increased use of differentiated activities would benefit lower attainers.
69. Overall, standards in geography are above the national average at the end of Year 9 and well above average at the end of Year 11. This represents good achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above the national average. The department has introduced successful strategies to raise the attainment of boys to well above the national average. Results in previous years have been consistently good, with an above-average percentage of higher grades.
70. In Years 7 to 9 standards of work are above average. Students are achieving well and make good progress in lessons. Revised schemes of work and an emphasis on literacy skills have helped to raise standards. Year 7 students write confidently on the effects of tourism on the way of life in the Alps through the help of key words and writing frames. Teachers emphasise reading and using the correct geographical terms and this is having a positive effect on achievement and literacy skills. Most students' numeracy skills are good enough to cope with statistics, graphs and concepts such as scale and direction that are used in geography. Year 9 students used choropleth maps to analyse population distribution and were able to suggest reasons for sparse and dense population in selected regions. Year 8 students used the computer to plot information on earthquakes and construct a scatter-graph to see if there was a relationship between the Richter scale and the number of deaths. Higher attainers by Year 9

make good links between human activities and their impact on the environment. Students' projects on the Masai of Kenya provided good opportunities for extension work. Lower attainers, including those with special educational needs, have difficulty with extended writing and the department could further develop differentiated activities and the use of support staff in lessons.

71. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average and achievement is good in relation to prior attainment. The new GCSE course has helped the department follow schemes of work and assessment procedures that suit students better. Year 10 students were studying plate movements and were able to explain in detail how and why earthquakes occur. Year 11 developed their understanding of population pyramid diagrams when discussing their answers after an examination question. Boys and girls are achieving at the higher levels with coursework, using a wide range of skills. Year 11 projects provided opportunities for detailed research on coastal processes following a field visit to Hengistbury Head. Detailed notebooks provide a very good base for learning and student progress is supported by revision sheets and end-of-module assessments.
72. Teaching and learning are good in all years with some examples of very good practice and resultant learning. In most lessons the depth of teachers' knowledge has a very positive impact on learning. In a Year 10 lesson the teachers' expert explanation of plate boundaries and convection currents, using a power point presentation, interested students of all levels of attainment, and provided a very firm foundation to their learning on volcanoes and earthquakes. Lessons are well prepared, with clear objectives, and as a result students make good progress. Supportive marking with guidelines of how to improve has assisted student progress. Teaching was less effective when there was a lack of challenge; there were too many tasks or explanations that were not clear. The head of department has invested considerable time and energy in developing the team's understanding of students' learning and appropriate teaching styles. Good practice in the classroom is not widely enough shared across the department.
73. The department is well led by a dynamic and forward-looking head of department. Imaginative schemes of work, effective assessment methods and greater understanding of learning strategies have all helped to raise standards. Visits to Rothampton Park in Year 8 and Dorset in Year 10 are well established, but there is scope for further field-work opportunities in Year 7 and 9. Excellent display work in the department has a very positive effect on students' learning. The department has addressed all issues in the last inspection and the subject is well placed to build on its success and make further progress in the future.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong subject leader has a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
  - Teaching is good and students are enthusiastic learners.
  - High quality assessment practices enable students to be well informed about their learning.
  - A wide range of enrichment opportunities involve students well.
  - The need to increase the challenge for the more able at Key Stage 3.
74. Over the last year, the department has focused on raising the achievement of students, especially that of boys. In GCSE examinations in 2003 results were well above those of 2002 and in line with national averages, though a little below the overall school figure. Analysis of value-added scores showed that progress for most students was good. The difference between boys and girls was slight, much smaller than it had been in previous years. In Key Stage 3, there has been a sustained rise in achievement over three years that matches that in

other subjects. Boys and girls have improved equally, though the gap between them remains the same.

75. The focus on achievement can be seen in students' work. Students work well across all ability levels, and there is evidence of good progress, particularly among the less able. This commitment is recognized and regularly praised by teachers. Both students and teachers have a positive attitude towards learning and are committed to the school's Learning Charter. For high attainers in Years 7 and 8 there is a need for greater challenge to enable higher order thinking and depth in their oral and written work. By Year 9 and at GCSE all students are working at levels that are challenging their predicted levels and grades. For example, in a Year 11 class, students had to use a range of sources to illustrate factors that explain the USA's hostility to the Soviet Union in the 1950s. They were able to distil their explanation into a minute of speaking. This gave structure to all, but the higher attainers extended their ideas and explanation well.
76. The department is developing teaching and learning with creative flair. They engage in new approaches, such as the Key Stage 3 Strategy and accelerated learning, to develop a wide range of stimulating lessons. They provide access to learning through support, extension and challenge for all abilities. Students respond to teachers with great maturity, especially in Key Stage 4, although in all years there is room to develop students' reflection on what they have learnt in a lesson or a series of lessons.
77. The good, and often very good, teaching reflects the quality of leadership and management. Planning shows very good, creative teamwork. There is an excellent culture of sharing good practice in ideas, strategies and resources. The department is good at self-evaluation, which promotes self-criticism and confidence. It is developing new ideas for studying history that involve media studies and technology. For example, the good use of topic-related key words/ideas informs students' understanding of key events, people and historical ideas. Learning objectives and outcomes are shared and often evaluated by students. In one Year 8 lesson, after a snappy starter activity on the medieval church, students decided on the lesson objectives. Learning is good because students understand what lessons are about, what is expected of them and how well they learn. One very good example is the investigation of the Harpenden war memorial in Year 9. Students analyse the figures of local and national war dead, research individuals, speculate on the effects of war on the local community and ask moral questions. Assessment work is highly valued, and helps students track their own progress against levels of achievement and set themselves learning targets. A similar process is in place in Key Stage 4, linked to exam levels and target grades.
78. The head of history's leadership is the key to the growing success of the subject. She has a clear vision of what the subject can achieve for students over time. However, the recent reduction in teaching time provided for humanities subjects in Key Stage 3 is an issue that will need to be evaluated by the school so that it does not create a disadvantage just as the department is trying to raise the profile of history.

## **Religious education**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching, learning, assessment and attitudes contribute to students' high achievement levels.
- GCSE examination results are well above average.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The pace slackens towards the end of some lessons.
- The use of ICT is not well enough developed.

## Commentary

79. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and achievement is good. Students make rapid progress in their understanding of several world religions. They develop the ability to argue for and against various viewpoints and begin to understand what it means to belong to a faith. They look at controversial issues in the world today and start to think deeply. Lower-attaining students are assisted in many ways so that their confidence develops and they make good progress.
80. In Years 10 and 11 students work in an atmosphere of purposeful activity. From September 2003 a new curriculum has been introduced so that all students will take the short course GCSE examination at the end of Year 10. So far they are responding well to the challenge of early entry in a GCSE subject. The standards of those students following the full course in Year 11 are above average.
81. The students are positive, involved and interested in what they are doing. They listen to the teachers, and to one another, with courtesy and respect. They take pride in their work and aim high.
82. Teaching is very good throughout the school. Lessons are interesting and challenging and provide many different opportunities for students to achieve well. Just occasionally the pace slackens towards the end of some lessons. Classes are managed very effectively with firmness and humour. Students' literacy skills are promoted by reading aloud, writing in different styles, developing confidence in using specialist vocabulary and expressing their ideas in a mature and articulate way. Homework is used well to reinforce and extend learning. There are good examples of the use of ICT, though this is an area which is not yet fully developed.
83. This vibrant and exciting department is very well led and managed. The teachers have high aspirations for all their students. They have a shared vision and commitment and work very well as a team. Planning is detailed and thorough. Assessment is used very well to help students understand how they are progressing and what needs to be done to improve. Teaching rooms are full of thoughtful and eye-catching displays, with many examples of students' work. The department has made very good improvement since the last inspection.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

The quality of provision in design and technology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment are well above average and students achieve well.
- The range of teaching and learning resources contributes to high standards.
- Teachers' self-evaluation and analysis are linked to action points and progress.
- There is good access to IT facilities.
- Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not regular enough.

## Commentary

84. The teachers' assessments in 2003 of the students' standards in design and technology show these to be good by the end of Year 9. At higher levels, however, the students do not at present do so well when compared with those of other schools. Believing, with some justification, that their assessment methods may be too harsh, the teachers are reconsidering these. The current Year 9 students' standards are above average. However, students in Years



7 to 9 are not assessed frequently enough to ensure that they are learning and gaining in understanding at a very high rate. In particular, while their skills' achievement is on average very good in all areas - electronics, food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles - there is generally much less understanding of the underpinning science and of the whole design process.

85. The department's work in Years 10 and 11 leads to well above average standards in the GCSE. Boys and girls achieve well. On the other hand, perhaps because of their lower numbers, girls do not take as much part in some lessons in Years 7 to 9 as boys (for instance, they tend to sit at the back and not to raise their hands). Although their work is as good as boys', their enjoyment is lower, and they do not often choose resistant materials for GCSE. Year 11 students' standards, as observed during the inspection, are well above average, overall; they continue to achieve very well in skills' development, but generally remain less clear about the theory. For instance, not many know what cooking does to foodstuffs or the criteria for the choice of textiles techniques or specific resistant materials in given cases. Few are fully at home with the nature of the whole design process and the purpose of its steps.
86. Teaching and learning are good and strengths include:
- planning of courses, modules and lessons;
  - variety of activities in, and pace of, lessons (especially in the earlier years);
  - their high expectations of the students, especially in the GCSE years;
  - well-designed homework activities to support lessons;
  - wide range and high effectiveness of the teaching and learning techniques and resources used.
87. Leadership and management are very good. There is a strong sense of teamwork, including the technical support staff, who are deeply involved in the department's work. The range and levels of resources are good, except at times for access to ICT. Accommodation, however, is restricted and workshops are dispersed. There has been good progress since the last inspection - particularly as regards standards, the use of computer-aided design and manufacture and special resources for students with special needs.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Drama**

88. Drama is taught as a discrete subject. Although the results at GCSE this year are below national averages, the newly appointed staff in the department are well placed to capitalise on favourable opportunities that exist for drama in both key stages.

### **Media Arts Specialist Status**

89. The school's Media Arts specialist status is now in its second year. New resources and facilities as well as expert technical support staff are now beginning to have a positive impact upon teaching and learning strategies throughout the school. The facilities and technical resources are impressive, creating an innovative and stimulating teaching environment for students.
90. The resources available, both for school and community use, include a new TV studio, cinema control room, video-editing suite and a music technology suite. These have been created with industry standards in mind to prepare students for working in the media industry.
91. Most students in the school have been able to participate in a number of curricular and extended curricular events. For example, the week long Arts Festival provided students with an interesting range of activities, including computer animation and film making. All Year 12 students have participated in a film-making week culminating in an Oscar-style ceremony.

Faculty days, using the available technologies, have included work with Year 7 on video production and with Year 8 on drug awareness.

92. Voluntary staff familiarisation and training have included reviewing the resources and analysing the enhanced teaching and learning methods that are now available. These have led to the music department incorporating media modules in Years 7 to 9 and facilitating both composing and performing work in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Work within the community has included projects with both primary and secondary schools.

## Art

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are good.
  - Teaching and learning are good, including some very good teaching in Years 10 and 11.
  - Standards achieved by students at all levels are well above average.
  - Sketch-books are used well to develop and explore ideas.
  - Self-assessment helps students to reflect on their work and to improve their literacy skills.
93. Standards are high in all years and students achieve well. By the end of Year 9, standards of work of both boys and girls are above the national average. In the 2003 GCSE examinations the girls achieved very high standards and, while the boys did not achieve as highly, they still did better than boys nationally.
94. When students enter the school in Year 7 their work is slightly above the expected level. For example, the drawing skills of both boys and girls are well developed, showing a good understanding of scale, tone and texture. These skills are developed for all students through the use of a wide range of different materials, including pastel, ink, paint and clay. By the end of Year 9, there is clear evidence that all students have made good progress, with the higher attainers making very good progress. Their ability to handle materials with growing confidence can be seen in the way they blend colours, handle clay and papier-mâché and explore the possibilities of mixing different media. This is supported by the work in sketch-books, which shows high levels of research, helping students to explore and develop ideas. Lower-attaining students have a more limited range of technical skill.
95. The overall standard in Year 11 is well above average and confirms the very good progress students continue to make. The course is structured around broad themes, and students are encouraged to develop personal ideas. The flexible nature of the teaching also enables students to use textile processes like appliqué and batik. This helps to broaden the range of possibilities and enriches the work of some students. The quality of three-dimensional work is also very good, with many examples of imaginative sculpture using clay, papier-mâché, fabric and recycled objects. ICT is often used for research to extend ideas and collect information about other artists.
96. The use of digital imagery and the creation of a gallery of students' work on the school website is particularly useful for the display of exemplary work. An extremely exciting piece of animation, showing high levels of skill and understanding is a good example of what students could do, but this was not a common feature throughout the department. The quality of the work in sketch-books remains very high, with evidence of lively, inquisitive research, good observational skills and an awareness of the work of other artists. The subject makes a good contribution to developing students' literacy skills, especially in self-assessment comments and annotated notes in sketch-books. The department makes a substantial contribution to social, cultural and spiritual development through a range of activities and clubs such, as life drawing, media, a programme of master classes and visits to galleries and residencies.

97. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Some teaching in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory owing to the use of non-specialist staff, but teaching in Years 10 and 11 is always at least good and often very good.
98. The course is well planned and the teachers and students are clear about what should be taught. Work is developed from previous learning and the level of challenge is appropriate. Teachers give clear advice, they demonstrate techniques and processes with skill and use discussion and questioning to extend the students' own knowledge. The lessons start crisply using peer and self-assessment and this sets the tone for the attitudes and behaviour expected throughout the lesson. This is exemplary, with students listening carefully, making mature contributions and being very supportive and encouraging to one another. Homework assignments are completed by the majority of students and carefully linked, by the teachers, into effective class-work activities.
99. The good leadership and management of the department are significant factors in raising standards. The department now benefits from a ceramics room, which is well equipped and used fully. This is an improvement since the last inspection and helps considerably to raise standards, especially for the low attainers.

## Media studies

The provision for media studies is **excellent**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The expertise of teachers and technicians ensures that students experience a well planned and stimulating curriculum.
  - Excellent resources are skilfully used by staff to support and extend students' learning.
  - Leadership and management are real strengths and very good teaching engenders positive attitudes in the students.
100. In the GCSE examination, the number of students gaining grades A\* to C in 2003 is well above the national average and students achieved well. The department has a strong tradition for creating a resource bank of exemplar materials for GCSE and A level, which is used to foster independent learning and give students a sound understanding of the examination requirements. Standards are well above average.
  101. Students demonstrated very good progress in all the lessons observed. Teaching throughout the department is never less than good and is occasionally excellent. High expectations and standards, together with thorough planning, facilitate students' achievements. Very effective use is made of technical support staff and this helps develop students' learning and understanding; for instance, in a Year 10 lesson based in the studio, students were given high quality technical support and training in camera, sound, editing and presenting skills.
  102. Leadership and management within the department are excellent; the curriculum and extended curriculum activities are under review and development. In particular, the analysis of examination results and its application in devising appropriate teaching and learning methods to raise standards is a strength. This was evident in most of the lessons observed.
  103. Since the last inspection the department has expanded, recruiting new teachers and technical staff with excellent levels of expertise. The department has raised the status of the subject throughout the school. Assessment techniques have greatly enhanced the work of the department in particular with the use of effective target-setting techniques. The technical resources available to the department are second to none. The department has now established a very strong base of technical resources and expertise which can be further utilised throughout the curriculum.

## Example of outstanding practice

**Innovative use of media and communication technologies raises standards.** New technologies empower staff to engage in diverse teaching and learning using cutting-edge facilities. For example, humanities use the TV studio for students to report from history's front lines. Science produce animations of cellular behaviour and music students create film scores. A Year 11 lesson exemplifies the impact of specialist status on student learning. Teachers' high expectations were coupled with impressive technical resources to produce a TV show 'Teen Talk'. Students were skilfully supported by experienced teachers as they undertook roles of presenter, interview panellists, technical crew and editing. The show was recorded with an impressive and mature debate. Students showed high levels of skill and confidence in their discussions as well as in the technical features of making a TV programme. Bold ideas include entire year groups making films about social issues on a single production day and then shown in the school's cinema. Also, Year 12 have completed a film-making course culminating in an awards show. Other schools bring students for intensive production courses to excellent effect. The school has outstanding industry relationships, including work placements and visits to professional external organisations.

## Music

The provision for music is **excellent**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The commitment of the staff to the raising of the standards of teaching and learning in music through a well-organised and demanding curriculum.
  - The positive relationships with students.
  - The quality and range of instrumental provision in the school.
  - The high standards achieved in extra-curricular and extended curricular opportunities.
  - The technologies available are not fully exploited because of lack of technical support.
  - Not all accommodation is fully resourced.
104. Standards on entry in Year 7 are above average. Students make very good progress throughout Years 7 to 9 and, in 2003 teacher assessments in Year 9, the percentage of students gaining level 5 and above was well above the national average. Characteristics of very good teaching were seen in a Year 9 lesson on 'Music and Media' where students' understanding of the role of music in films and advertisements to portray emotion and moods was extended and challenged in a lively discussion. Clips of films were shown and the music discussed, relating observations to the musical elements. Students were then introduced to the music programme 'Cubase' and soon they were composing melodic ostinati with eerie string sounds following a demonstration by the teacher. Activities were very well paced and varied allowing the maximum amount of time for music-making. Students made very good progress, both in musical and in technological terms.
105. In GCSE examinations, grades continue to rise, with both boys and girls achieving standards well above the national average for the last three years. Students in Year 11 are performing well above average. They were all involved in a performance of a ground bass with a range of different parts to suit all abilities in the class. The lesson pace was brisk and activities were varied to motivate and keep students on task throughout the lesson. In group work the more able students helped those who were finding their own parts difficult. High expectations were coupled with very good standards of performance. Practical work was linked closely to listening materials: ground basses were played from a range of styles and contexts, with students showing a very good range of musical vocabulary. The work was also closely linked to the examination requirements.
106. Teaching and learning in lessons are never less than good and are mainly very good. Students are immersed in the language of music and receive a high quality musical education in the three areas of performing, composing and listening. Students are happy developing their

knowledge, skill and understanding using a range of instruments and voice and they progress very well. Homework is used very well to further students' experience and understanding of music. Teachers' high expectations helps motivate and enthuse the students. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, students working on complicated rhythms and phrases showed a clear understanding of musical terms and vocabulary. They improvise with confidence over a rhythmic ostinato as soloists, in groups and as a class.

107. The department is well led and managed and good support is given to newly appointed member of the department. All staff show a commitment to the nurturing of music throughout the school, not only through lessons but also in the extended curriculum. Music contributes a great deal to the life and ethos of the school and to the development of students. This is seen in the range of extra-curricular and extended curricular opportunities offered by the department and in the increasing number of students learning an instrument, currently a third of the school's population. The department is heavily involved in concerts; the highlight of the year is the annual music tour, this year to Italy where students performed in such venues as St Mark's Cathedral in Venice.
108. The department continues to make the good progress identified in the last two inspection reports, extending and consolidating its work, particularly with regard to the increasing instrumental provision and the use of ICT. The present accommodation is unsatisfactory to meet the needs of an expanding department and the use of the new technologies would be enhanced by technical support.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**, with a significant number of **very good** features.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management.
  - Assessment is very helpful to students – they understand what they can do and how to improve,
  - An excellent programme of extra-curricular activities.
109. Current standards are well above average by the end of Year 11 and average by the end of Year 9. However, achievement has improved and standards are higher in Years 7 and 8 than in Year 9. In Year 8 some students are already working at levels seen in much of the current Year 9 work – in their understanding of suppleness in developing fitness and how it can be tested, for example. Both achievement and teaching have improved since the last inspection. The trend is upwards in Years 9 and 11, although the improvement is as yet more marked in Years 7 and 8 and in Year 10. The improvements result from very good curriculum leadership. The head of department, who arrived two years ago, has succeeded in developing a shared vision for the improvement of teaching, and has improved the systems and procedures for tracking standards. More analysis of this data would be beneficial in order to inform further curriculum development. He now carries out monitoring of teaching with the support of senior members of staff. An excellent programme of extra-curricular activities enables many students to further develop their personal and physical skills.
110. In Years 7 to 9 teachers use their very good knowledge to plan lessons following the physical education National Curriculum requirements. A particular strength is the way they have developed activities so that students are developing their information communication skills. Strategies include 'Powerpoint' displays, use of word-processing to improve presentation skills and assessment of performance through observation of their own performance. This means that students are now more able to assess what level they are working at and how to improve. For example, students in Year 7 could observe their performance of basic balances and identify areas for improvement. This helped with their understanding of good body position and tension and therefore enabled them to improve their performance.

111. Teachers used a variety of teaching styles in Years 7 to 9, recognising that students learn in different ways. They target the work well to the standards the students are at, with students often working with different equipment, on different tasks and with students of similar attainment. The result is that learning is at least mainly good. Teachers are helped in targeting the work by the good assessment they make of what students can do. This is also true of Years 10 and 11, where, in addition, the students develop learning skills which prepare them for the demands of the physical education and dance examination courses. The work is well marked, with comments that both praise and challenge, in a way that helps students to know at what level they are working.
112. Teaching and learning are good. Most of the teaching is good with a significant number of very good lessons. In Years 7 to 9, teachers identify targets and learning strategies, which help students to develop good levels of knowledge, understanding and performance of basic throwing, catching and striking skills. Teachers also recognise the need for students to develop an understanding of physical education terminology, working co-operatively in pairs and small groups and being able to assess their own performance. In Years 10 and 11 standards in core physical education lessons have fallen below those of examination groups because of the lack of challenging teaching. This has improved in Year 10 lessons where students are working on analysing their own and others' performance and on planning activities in order to take responsibility for their own learning. This has had a positive affect on improving achievement.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (PSHE) AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **PSHE and citizenship**

Overall provision in PSHE and citizenship is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership and management are very good.
  - Carefully planned course linked to careers and PSHE.
  - Opportunities for active participation in citizenship are extensive.
  - The impact of the school council is impressive.
  - The clear commitment of other subject areas to supporting the subject.
  - Good assessment systems are in place but require time to develop.
- 
113. Overall, standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Knowledge and understanding of citizenship are developed fully, both in discrete lesson time and in a range of other subjects across the school. The emphasis on discussion, debate, paired and group work is improving knowledge and understanding and raising standards, especially for the low attaining students. The broad range of enrichment activities plays a significant part in this.
  114. The school has developed many opportunities where students can explore their rights and responsibilities, especially through active participation. They are taught about democratic institutions and systems in history, the European Union in modern foreign languages and have to sign 'responsibility agreements' before using ICT equipment.
  115. The school council is a powerful vehicle for the development of knowledge and understanding about responsibility and fully develops the skills of participation and communication. There is an impressive list of activities, which encourage real participation in community aspects. These include support for the homeless, for local charities, peer mentoring and older students' involvement in governing body meetings.
  116. Teaching and learning are good, overall. The majority of lessons seen motivated all students and it was evident that they were engaged in enjoyable and stimulating activities. The citizenship curriculum is delivered through an integrated course involving careers and PSHE. It

has been carefully arranged so that connections between the three components are fully exploited for the benefit of the students, but has a clarity which helps the students to see the separate aspects and their contribution to the whole.

117. The programme of different units covers a broad range of issues affecting the life of young people. For instance, in a Year 7 lesson, students discussed what appropriate behaviour in the classroom should look like, what made a good listener and then produced a list of agreed statements about behaviour. They did this with a mature confidence, the high attainers supporting and encouraging students with less ability in paired discussion. Year 8 students were enthusiastic and excited when they explored the cost of a chosen life style, realising that certain aspirations would have consequences for employment and levels of income. Students with special educational needs made good progress when involved in discussion, debate and concentration but showed weaknesses in written work.
118. For Year 10 and Year 11 students there is an appropriate emphasis on career choices, environmental issues and work experience. A particular strength was their diaries, meticulously completed during work experience. The comments by students indicated a growing desire to succeed, with some perceptive self-assessment; this work had a real impact on the self-esteem of the students, especially the less able.
119. The head of department has been in post for only one year, but has succeeded in establishing a well-planned curriculum, delivered by a dedicated staff and supported effectively by other subject areas. The audit carried out was very comprehensive and mapped the delivery of the subject accurately across the curriculum. A review of the assessment systems has been carried out and the teachers are now in a good position to fulfil the requirements for statutory assessment in 2004.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 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. Validated results for 2003 are not yet available.

### *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	17	100	96.1	70.6	48.6	100.0	85.1
Biology	6	100	91.6	66.7	36.3	100.0	74.1
Business Studies	13	100	96.4	23.1	32.8	72.3	76.5
Communication studies	16	100	98.3	50.90	36.8	90.0	81.1
Drama	14	100	98.1	57.1	41.5	91.4	82.9
English Literature	25	100	98.5	44.0	43.7	85.6	84.3
French	6	100	96.2	66.7	46.1	96.7	83.0
Design and technology	13	100	95.3	38.5	35.5	84.6	76.5
Geography	6	100	97.1	66.7	40.5	96.7	80.9
History	13	100	97.1	76.9	41.0	98.5	81.2
Mathematics	15	100	93.3	46.7	52.2	84.0	84.7
Other social studies	26	100	94.3	34.6	38.9	75.4	77.7
Physics	6	100	92.8	16.7	42.8	60.0	78.6
Religious studies	5	100	96.3	80.0	44.0	108.0	82.2
Sports/PE studies	9	100	95.4	11.1	39.5	71.1	73.2

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

The overall quality provision of English in the sixth form is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very high standards.
- Very good teaching and learning.
- Very good marking and assessment.
- Students' ability to research and learn for themselves is a strength.

### Commentary

120. Standards in both Year 12 and Year 13 are well above national averages. In the AS examinations the percentage of A and B grades has been rising each year. Nearly all year 12 students stay on for the A2 examinations in Year 13, and attainment in 2003 was outstanding,



- with three in every four candidates obtaining grades A or B, and no failures. This represents very good achievement compared with the already high prior attainment of those students.
121. High standards are due to very good teaching, which encourages students to learn on their own. They are given clear guidance and thorough feedback on all their work. They appreciate the support given by teachers, and enjoy the process of reading and discussion. For these reasons, English is the most popular sixth form subject.
122. Lessons observed during the inspection confirmed the high standards achieved in exams. Essays are well-structured and incorporate quotation effectively. The range of work is wide, the presentation very good. Students frequently present their ideas to the whole class, and the subsequent level of debate shows close knowledge of the texts and an ability to cope with sophisticated concepts. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson, the class had been discussing sycophancy, male bonding and jealousy in *Much Ado about Nothing*, when students suggested there were 'inverse parallels' in the way the protagonists reacted to these pressures. The teacher responded at once to this idea, and extended it further with diagrams on the board. To introduce the important idea of palimpsests in *The Handmaid's Tale* the teacher played a tape of nursery rhymes superimposed on each other, and led a fruitful discussion about how the present takes its shape and colour from the past. All lessons were presented imaginatively, all had variety, all allowed many opportunities for discussion. Students were expected to research widely; they all said how helpful they found the library. If books were not in stock they were soon obtained.
123. Improvement has been achieved through purposeful leadership and sheer hard work. Teachers share imaginative approaches, mark diligently, and require high standards. Students, in turn, know what is expected of them, and how to respond. They enjoy the experience, and give of their best. Results have improved since the last report. They are now among the best in the school.

## French

The overall quality of provision for French is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- High expectations leading to a good level of challenge.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very good.
- Staff have strong subject knowledge and teaching is good.
- The setting of targets for improvement through marking is insufficiently refined.

### Commentary

124. Although numbers of students entered for A-level French recently have been relatively low, results have been above average. The number of higher grades attained has also been above average.
125. The standard of work of current students is in line with expectations for the course. Year 13 students are achieving well in terms of their written work, but they show a slight reluctance to engage in discussion unless fully prompted by teachers. In one lesson they had to adopt the stance of a famous person - for example, Tony Blair or David Beckham - and outline their character's position on the Euro. They were well supported by a bank of opinion statements, and eventually produced some good quality, accurate oral exchanges. They are well informed about the topics under study in the specification, such as AIDS in the French-speaking world and immigration.
126. Students in Year 12 are achieving much as expected, given that they are only a little way into the course. They are beginning to move on successfully from their GCSE work, developing their ability to give a variety of opinions. They are able to appreciate both sides of an issue, and

are beginning to organise their thoughts into a logical sequence in order to defend a stance. In one lesson they were able to understand the subtleties of the French “Pacte Civil de Solidarité” (an agreement between unmarried couples) and compare it with the conventions of a traditional British marriage. They attempt readily to contribute to discussion, but with a wide range of prior attainment in the group their accuracy is not as secure as it might be. This does not, however, interfere with communication.

127. Teaching is good, overall, and students learn well as a result. The principal features of teaching are clear objectives, an exclusive use of French for classroom routines as well as practice, good planning and a range of methods and approaches to bring about learning. Teachers appreciate the different ways in which students learn, and show good subject knowledge in their questioning and explanations and in the tasks they set. The lesson on the family in Year 12, for example, had students competing in pairs to find information from three different sources and feed it back to the group as a whole. This gave the teacher an opportunity to work with and support the weaker students in the group so that they could keep pace with the others.
128. Students’ written work shows the ability to organise ideas and present or refute an argument. Marking is thorough and helpful, but specific targets for improvement are not always set consistently. Students learn well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the different learning styles that they experience. They support and help one another effectively, although they are not always as confident in offering ideas in open discussion.
129. Students are beginning to develop the skills to work independently outside lessons. The department has produced a useful study guide, which gives students a wealth of information about the examinations they will take, along with assessment criteria, a section on study skills and a grammar checklist. There are opportunities to develop independent listening skills through a listening station installed in the library, supported by a good range of self-access materials. There are identified lessons in the week in which students have assignments to complete which require independent research skills. There is some evidence in students’ written work of Internet-based research into topics such as immigration.
130. The good teaching and good learning result from work in the subject being well led and managed. Although the subject head is a recent appointment, she has already introduced work on a range of approaches that encourage effective learning and develop students’ independence. The department is also developing a range of support materials. Target-setting is becoming established, but targets are not yet sharply enough focused on specific learning goals that will improve students’ performance. There is a commitment to build on what has already been achieved and to improve standards further.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Students follow A-level mathematics and a small number also study further mathematics. Only one lesson of further mathematics was observed, in which Year 13 students were taught an excellent lesson on minimum connector problems and were achieving very high standards. The number of students taking the course each year does not make it possible for reliable comparisons to be made with national averages, but results have generally been at the highest grades.

Provision for mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The students mostly achieve well and attain higher standards than are predicted by their GCSE examination results.
- Teachers promote very good learning by inspiring and motivating the students to give of their best.
- Insufficient attention is given to developing the mathematical skills of sixth form students who are not on A level courses.

- The students benefit from strong and effective leadership.

### **Commentary**

131. The very good standards that the students were achieving at the last inspection have been maintained, with some fluctuations that reflect the different nature of each group of students. Results at A level have generally been close to or well above average in recent years. Students' results in mathematics are generally better on average than their results in other subjects. For example, in 2003, mathematics was the highest performing subject for which there was a significant number of students. There has been no significant difference in performance by gender and no difference was discernible in observations during the inspection. The 2003 group did extremely well, with 15 out of the 19 students attaining an A or B grade. The current Year 13 are not as strong a group, as their AS level results show, but even so are on course to achieve above average results by the end of the year. Entry requirements to A level are such that most students have gained at least a B grade at GCSE and in most cases higher. These standards on entry are built on well and most students achieve higher results at A level than their GCSE examination results would indicate.
132. This good achievement is due to several factors. Firstly, the students have been very well prepared at GCSE. Their skills and mathematical understanding give them a very good grounding from which to start A level. Algebraic skills are very good and the students tackle problems systematically. For example, in a Year 13 introductory lesson to partial fractions the students manipulated algebraic fractions with such ease that the teacher was able to adapt the lesson and push the students much further and faster than she had anticipated. Similarly, the teacher was able to move a Year 12 group studying the coordinate geometry of a straight line on rapidly because they had grasped the concepts taught previously and could apply them systematically to the problems set. By contrast, a Year 13 group was seen to be struggling to apply its knowledge of the normal distribution to more complex problems and became confused in spite of the teacher's patient and varied explanations.
133. Secondly, the quality of teaching is very good, overall. The students are consistently challenged and very often working to the limits of their capability. Teaching is rarely less than good and is excellent at times. The teachers have a great deal of experience, expertise and interest in mathematics. The use of open-ended investigations and other challenging activities were observed, for example, in a Year 12 lesson on the characteristics of the parabola. The students had to investigate the shapes generated by various quadratic equations by using graphic calculators. The teacher encouraged them to search for generalisations and explanations. While prompting them in the right direction if they became stuck, he forced them to think rather than giving them the answer. This generated some excellent collaboration and discussion as the students became immersed in the work.
134. This lively teaching fires the enthusiasm of the students, who work hard and enjoy learning. This commitment of the students is the third main factor in their good achievement. They are strongly supportive of one another, often using their spare time to work through problems together or taking the opportunity to see their teachers outside lessons to clear up any difficulties they might be having. The students acknowledge the time and commitment that their teachers devote to them and feel that they are challenged and extended by the work.
135. One current shortcoming is that, under the present arrangements, department staff have virtually no input into developing the key skills of students who are not taking a sixth form mathematics course. This matter is currently being considered by the school as part of a review of sixth form provision.
136. The subject is very well led and managed at sixth form level by the head of department and the teacher with responsibility for A level. They work well as a team and are continually seeking ways to improve the students' achievement. For example, following disappointing AS level results in 2003, they have restructured the course to a very tight lesson-by-lesson schedule. This is to ensure that the students have sufficient time to finish and revise fully the

third module (Pure Mathematics 2) before the examination. While this is a valuable development, staff are aware that it leaves little flexibility to spend more time on an aspect if it is causing problems. A review of this programme has wisely been identified as a priority.

## SCIENCE

Biology and physics were inspected and psychology was sampled. In the two A-level psychology lessons observed the teaching and learning were good.

### Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The rising standards at A2 level.
- Students are encouraged to play an active part in lessons and this helps to consolidate their learning of difficult concepts.
- Students are not sufficiently encouraged to give full oral answers in order to enhance their examination techniques.
- The lack of leadership and management of the department is inhibiting its development.

#### Commentary

137. In the 2002 A level examination the results were well above the national average and although lower in 2003 the results are still expected to be above the national average. The results in the AS examinations are not as high, being average. The majority of students obtain the grades predicted by their previous levels of attainment and show good achievement in the A level and satisfactory achievement in the AS examinations.
138. The standard of work seen in lessons of the current Years 12 and 13 students is above average. No folders showing the Year 12 work of the current Year 13 were available to view. The organisational skills of some of the students are weak so that they are unable easily to refer to the work covered, and a number of students use a limited range of learning skills; for example, the failure to highlight, annotate and subtitle their notes means that using their usefulness as a revision resource is limited. In lessons, Year 13 students were seen carrying out an investigative experiment during which they developed their practical skills and showed a good theoretical understanding of the processes being investigated; this meant that they were able to explain, in scientific terms, the results that they had obtained. Year 12 students were seen coming to grips with the biochemical aspects of starch, sugar and cellulose and experiencing a steep learning curve with an introduction to biological drawing.
139. Teaching is good, overall, and this is resulting in current students making good progress. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, evident in their lesson planning and in the answers to students' questions, enables students to understand difficult concepts. The good challenge that is given to the students, combined with the frequent active role in presenting work to their peers, also consolidates the learning. However, short and one word answers are often accepted and so opportunities to develop answers linked to the examination requirements are missed, and at times the teachers tend to provide the answer themselves rather than use developmental questioning. Teachers have excellent relationships with students, who respond very well to the challenging teaching and are motivated to read around the subject and develop their independent learning skills.

140. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. The two teams of two work closely together to support and meet the needs of students; but, with no person in overall leadership, data is not analysed to focus on areas for improvement and the potential of the department is not being realised. Since the last inspection the levels of attainment have risen and the department has a good base from which to improve further.

## **Physics**

The provision for physics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and so students make good progress in their lessons.
- The staff use computers very effectively in their teaching and this gives students confidence to use them productively in their work.
- The students show very good attitudes to their work.
- Although results at AS and A level have been generally good in recent years there is some room for further improvement.

### **Commentary**

141. Results in both AS and A level examinations have been good in recent years. This is an improvement over the position at the time of the last inspection when results were just satisfactory. However, the results in physics are still a little below those in other subjects taken in the school. Some very high quality examples of coursework were seen. In one case a computer presentation had been prepared on the material Kevlar and, in another, a paper had been produced on a current area of research in physics. Both pieces of work deservedly gained almost full marks. This showed that students and staff could work together to produce very high standards and teachers should gain confidence from this in the task of raising all students' standards and improving their final grades.
142. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. They use the full range of resources available to them in their lessons so that the students are involved in an appropriate variety of learning activities. As a result learning is good. Particularly impressive is the use of computers as an aid. Teachers use them to illustrate experiments and to collate the results, as in a demonstration experiment on the charging of capacitors. Students show great confidence in their own use of the laptops provided, opening and searching text files and operating modelling programs. It is particularly impressive that students only a few weeks into their course have learnt to use their computers so effectively. However, a good balance needs to be struck between activities in the longer lessons. There were occasions, as in a Year 13 lesson with lenses, where students' progress and achievement were not as good as they should have been.
143. Management of the department is good. Sound overall planning and organisation enables students to benefit from the well-ordered environment and so achieve well. Systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of its teaching should help the department achieve the necessary extra improvement in students' results.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY [ICT]

The school offers AVCE in ICT in Years 12 and 13.

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and teachers have secure knowledge of the subject.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Independent learning is encouraged.
- Very few girls study ICT post-16.

### Commentary

144. The work seen in lessons and in students' portfolios confirms that standards are well above average. Students are confident and skilful in creating and testing complex database applications and in recognising the high standards of information and communication technology work demanded by local companies. All students are capable of building a personal computer from its component parts, installing and commissioning the operating software and using it to install a range of application software as well as a variety of peripheral devices.
145. All the students observed showed interest, enthusiasm and curiosity about the subject. Their attitudes are good. When they are working individually on coursework, they help one another, and discussion, sometimes with their teacher, is common. These discussions are always relevant to the work and contribute to the quality of learning. The students are well informed and articulate about the issues surrounding the impact of ICT on our society and the environment. The students can continue working on their computers at home and are able to transfer files by e-mail between college and home. Students reported that the learning resources available to them within the school are good.
146. In all the lessons observed, teaching was at least good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have a very good command of the subject, including first-hand knowledge gained from outside the educational environment. Continuity and progression are both strong qualities in lesson planning. The very good teaching draws out the students, who are very well motivated and keen to succeed. When students are working individually, teachers make good use of their time, discussing coursework with students. Very good use is made of the school's technical support staff who are on hand for the practical lessons to give detailed technical support.
147. Leadership and management are very good. The AVCE course meets the needs of the students, not all of whom have the normal five A\* to C grades at GCSE level, but who, nevertheless, are performing well on the course. At this level ICT has many more male than female students and the boys generally outperform the girls.
148. Teachers and students in other sixth form subjects make extensive and effective use of the information and communication technology resources. The Internet as a learning resource is widely utilised. All teachers and students are familiar with and confident in the use of presentation software, and all use desk-top publishing software effectively to enhance written work.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

The department provides AS and A level courses and, overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

#### **Main strengths**

- Standards on the AS and A level courses are above average.
- Students achieve well in relation to prior attainment.
- Teaching is good and ensures that students make progress.
- Fieldwork and ICT are well-embedded within schemes of work.
- The head of department provides very good leadership.

#### **Commentary**

149. Standards, overall, are above average in geography. Results of the most recent GCE A level examination were above average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and half gained the higher grades, A and B. The AS level examination results were good, with all except one student gaining at least a grade and 63 per cent of students gaining the higher grades A and B. When account is taken of students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, this represents good achievement in both AS and A level examinations. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of samples of their work confirm that standards achieved by current students are above average. Geography was not offered as a subject during the last inspection but since its introduction results in both AS and A levels have improved.
150. Students show good knowledge and understanding of topics in physical and human geography. In a Year 12 lesson, groups of students made professional presentations on the reasons why regions like Nepal and Antarctica were less populated than Japan and China. They were able confidently to answer questions from their colleagues and understood the differences between demographic density and distribution. Students use geographical skills appropriately to support their practical and fieldwork assignments, which are of a consistently high standard. Year 12 coursework demonstrated that students were able to apply Spearman's rank correlation when linking distance from the town centre in Colchester to land use changes. Students were able to use maps, photographs and statistical information with a high degree of confidence. In a Year 13 lesson, students analysed documentary evidence to research the reasons for the growth of Brighton as a tourist centre. ICT is well integrated into schemes of work and students support their work with the use of the Internet, data logging, graphic design and word processing.
151. Overall, the quality of teaching is good, with examples of very good teaching. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and this helps students develop their understanding of topics. Students learn well and work effectively in response to the good teaching. The teachers encouraged the students to ask and answer questions so that they could reflect on topics and further develop their understanding. Teachers recognised the individual needs of students by asking targeted questions, selecting particular groups and making sure that the tasks were challenging yet achievable. An impressive range of teaching methods is used in order to engage the students so that they can learn effectively. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher provided a stimulating Power Point presentation on glacial erosion processes that completely gained the interest of the group. The students then completed a structured worksheet on erosion features, followed by the opportunity to construct arêtes, corries and pyramidal peaks from modelling clay. Marking is supportive and clearly indicates what the students have to do to improve their performance. Year 13 students improved their essay writing skills by peer assessment of an examination question that had been completed on tourism and its dependency on primary resources. Students make particularly good progress when there is a

balance between teacher-led activity and independent or group work. In a Year 12 class the teacher introduced the key terms associated with river hydrographs with the help of Power Point slides. Students then worked independently on a demanding worksheet that led them through the variables that may affect the shape of hydrographs. The teacher concluded the lesson by asking the students to create a mnemonic to remember the permanent, transient and human controls on river flow. Teachers ensured that students had access to learning resources that were appropriate and effective for independent study.

152. Work in the subject is led and managed well by an innovative and forward-looking head of department. Schemes of work are well-developed, with detailed lesson plans and support material. There is a Year 12 residential field trip to Flatford Mill in Suffolk, and this provides opportunities for geomorphological and settlement work. Assessment data is used well to track students' progress and monitor target-setting. Regular meetings enable teachers to share good practice. The subject is well placed to increase option numbers in the sixth form and to further improve standards in the examinations.

### **History and Government and Politics**

Provision in history and government and politics is **good**. The department teaches both subjects and the latter brings in students from other local schools as part of a consortium arrangement.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The department shapes courses to be inclusive for a wide range of ability.
- Teaching is well planned and provides varied opportunities for learning.
- Independent learning is being promoted effectively.

### **Commentary**

153. Achievement in history has fluctuated widely over the last three years. However, most students achieved predicted grades or exceeded them, with girls achieving marginally higher results than boys. Students' AS results in 2003 fell below expectations. A level results were much better, comparing well with national averages and with an average points score above that for the school. Achievement in government and politics follows a similar pattern, although, since students from other sixth forms join the class, the full result of the group does not appear in school figures. Results are in line with national averages in both AS and A2.
154. There is an appropriate focus in both subjects on the acquisition and development of learning skills, with teachers working to promote independent learning. This is having some impact, especially with Year 13, though all students are receptive and conscientious. The department has planned a schedule of independent reading and learning tasks for students to do in preparation for lessons. This includes specific and wider reading, individual research and other approaches. In lessons, there is an emphasis on developing learning skills and reflecting on learning styles. In a Year 12 politics lesson, the teacher got the students to read and digest information about parties at speed, write notes of fewer than fifteen words, thus forcing them to use diagrams and symbols, and then to teach the others about the party they had studied. This led to useful discussion of learning technique. However, independent learning is more than directed distance learning and the department is grasping the idea of promoting autonomous learning, in Year 9 as well as Year 12. The aim is to find ways of getting students to develop their initiative, make decisions about and manage their own learning.
155. The work seen in classes and in files shows that students are progressing in line with predicted outcomes. Teachers present challenges for them through the activities, tasks and sources being used and work to make them accessible. The Year 12 history class were given a series of difficult texts from which to analyse the nature of Louis XIV's kingship. This they found hard, but the teacher ensured good learning by using a series of activities to deconstruct the sources and use them to build more complex ideas and explanations.



156. The courses are chosen and structured to provide variety for students, but also continuity within each year course to develop learning effectively and demonstrate good progression. Key skills are addressed in the teaching: literacy is a high priority and elements of numeracy appear in both courses. ICT is readily used both by teachers and students for presentations and essays, gathering and analysing evidence and, in politics, to develop case-studies and test theoretical models. The Internet is used to provide a rich source of information in both subjects. Students' competence in key skills varies with their general ability and prior learning, but the emphasis on teaching these skills ensures that expected progress is not hindered.
157. Students have a clear idea of how well they are learning. Target grades are reviewed regularly and their work is marked according to examination criteria. Teachers make clear what examination expectations are and students often mark their own and others' work. The department is beginning to bring the quality of assessment in the other key stages to the sixth form courses and adapt the system to the greater demands of A level. This is a department that enjoys teaching the students, understands what they need and has a clear idea of how best to provide it.

## **Religious education**

Overall provision in religious education is **good**.

Religious education in the sixth form was sampled. Religious education is taught effectively as units within the sixth form general studies course. In addition, A level GCE classes of ten or more students in most years have achieved well above average results over the past three years.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

### **Art**

The provision for art is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' independent learning skills are well developed.
- Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge.
- Students' sketch-books are of a high standard.
- A small number of students have weak observational skills.

### **Commentary**

158. Standards are above average and students achieve well. The sixth form course is suitable for both art and design and textiles students. Standards over the recent past have been higher than the national averages, with boys achieving higher than girls. The number of boys choosing to join the sixth form course does not equate with numbers achieving good grades in Key Stage 4. There is evidence of weak observational skills in a few students, which has an effect upon the standards they achieve.
159. Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and a passionate belief in developing the students as individual artists. They demonstrate techniques and processes well, give clear instructions and often develop discussions with students that provoke and challenge their understanding. They provide a wide range of support material from books, websites and visits to galleries.

160. Students use a wide range of materials well and are confident about making small- and large-scale work. There is an emphasis on independent research skills and the evidence of this can be seen in the quality of students' sketch-books. Their self-evaluation is built upon the firm foundation laid in earlier key stages, and can be seen in the annotations in sketch-books, well-developed arguments and the confidence to express strong opinions.
161. The individual nature of each students work is a result of the different aspects outlined above. It produces high quality work, which has enabled several students to progress from the department into art and design courses in higher education.

### **Media studies**

162. The media studies course was sampled. Standards are well above average. Results have been well above the national average for the last three years. This year, for example, A to Bs reached 57 per cent at A level and 70 per cent at AS level and all students gained A to E grades. For example, in a Year 13 lesson students demonstrated excellent understanding and knowledge of the concepts of the subject through their contribution in a class discussion analysing war films. Students' responses showed an excellent analysis of the social context of the films as well as the evidence of prior independent study. Careful planning reflected the teacher's in-depth subject knowledge and analysis of the examination requirements ensured a high quality learning experience for all students.

### **Music**

The provision for music is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students reach high standards and achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are often very good.
- The department is very well led and managed.

### **Commentary**

163. The department has a very good record of results over a number of years, with students during the past five years gaining a 100 per cent A-E grading. The work seen in lessons confirms that students are achieving above average standards in music. The school has maintained the levels of success noted at the last inspection and very good progress is made from GCSE through AS to A2 levels. In a Year 13 lesson, students could sight-read a phrase from a Bach chorale with confidence in four parts. They could identify inversions and explore their use of a variety of styles and contexts. The work culminated in a 'rock' version of Bach's original chord sequence.
164. Standards are high because teaching is never less than good and often it is very good. Students are challenged and encouraged to persevere in their work. Low standards are never accepted; skilful use is made of questioning to further students level of understanding. Students are enthusiastic and are heavily involved in the extra-curricular and extended curricular work of the department. A Year 13 girl sang very ably in a senior assembly during the week. Independent study is encouraged and suitable work is set for homework to extend independent study skills. The department is very well led and managed. Good use is made of ICT particularly to improve and extend students' skills in composing. A music technology course is to be introduced in the sixth form early in 2004.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

### Leisure and recreation

Overall, the quality of provision in leisure and recreation is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching.
- Examination results add value.
- Dedication and commitment of the staff to the development of the vocational curriculum and the growth of the subject.
- Very well-structured and monitored assessment scheme that is made clear to students.
- Impressive concern for the welfare and personal and social development of students.
- Current lack of clarity as to the place of the vocational curriculum.

### Commentary

165. Leisure and recreation is one of three subjects that currently make up the vocational curriculum in the sixth form. It is studied as an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education [AVCE] course, but owing mainly to staffing issues it has not operated consistently in each year group during its history, which is the past three years.
166. Considering the varying GCSE attainments of those students taking the course standards have shown good value being added. In 2002 the subject had an 89 per cent success rate, with grades ranging from B to U. This rose in 2003 to a 100 per cent success rate, with grades ranging from A to E. During those years there were more females than males in the groups, with the females gaining higher grades. The group beginning in September 2003 is the largest so far, but the majority is male. Students taking leisure and recreation tend to take other AVCE courses rather than mix and match between these and traditional A levels.
167. In the work seen, progress was being made at all levels of ability. It is clear that students were challenged to score beyond minimum pass grade requirements. Assignments were well constructed and show careful selection of material from secondary sources rather than wholesale lifting of text or pictures. Diagrams and graphs were considered for their appropriateness before being suitably inserted into written text. Work was assessed consistently, flagging what should be done to score higher marks. Student portfolios showed increasing independence in learning, meticulous planning and above average use of ICT. Written work was supplemented by audio tapes and video work. The 2003 group's video evidence of their 'Sports Quest' quiz evening, which raised money for autistic children in a special school, was made in association with both ICT and media students for the final unit 'leisure and recreation in action' and was an outstanding piece of collaborative work.
168. The quality of teaching and learning seen was very good. It illustrated the meticulous planning by staff and was very well structured and directed. For example, a Year 12 lesson on the procedures and requirements of an AVCE course was logically sequenced with a variety of tasks of different levels of challenge that met with a good response each time. The teacher had obvious command of the subject knowledge, which was very well presented to students along with clear instructions on how to improve the notes they were taking. Students were being challenged at each stage of the lesson to think for themselves, give an answer and then work on their own. The lesson was very well-focused on learning gain, assessment criteria and what was needed to obtain a higher score. Students were monitored individually about their work. There was impressive care for all: nobody was left behind. As a result, learning moved forward, the confidence of the students at this early stage in their course was raised and their knowledge, understanding and skill developed. Progress was clear to see and they were coping well with what they were being asked to do.

169. Considering there is no head of department as such the leadership and management of the subject are highly effective. This illustrates the dedication and commitment of the two members of staff who teach it. Documentation was impressive and very thorough, with meticulously planned lessons showing tasks, outcomes, resources needed and all related to the assessment criteria for each unit. A subject development plan has been drawn up in the last nine months. Unit assessment requirements were given to all students, which include what is needed to pass, for grade C and for grade A. The work of each student was monitored and tracked each week, with individual feedback given that included what is needed to improve further where appropriate. This represents outstanding practice, considering the short history of the subject and the fact that both teachers were part-time until this September.

### **Physical education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good and is improving students' abilities to be independent learners.
- Very good leadership and management are focused on raising standards.
- An excellent enrichment programme of recreation and leisure for all Year 12 students.

### **Commentary**

170. A level results were better in Year 13 than in Year 12, where they were in line with national averages rather than above. Year 13 results were only from a very small group of students. However, achievement looks set to improve. Teaching and students' achievement have improved since the last inspection as a result of very good curriculum leadership. The head of department has succeeded in developing a shared understanding of strategies to develop independent learning skills and to challenge students to make gains at levels in line with their ability. An excellent programme of enrichment activities in physical education enhances Year 12 students' opportunities to develop their own performance.
171. In Year 12, teachers plan activities which help students to acquire skills to deal with the examination requirements. A particular strength is the way that they include students in planning the strategies for achieving targets. Students are aware of what they are meant to learn and so can adapt activities appropriately. The focus on developing key skills of ICT, literacy and co-operating with others enables them to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, students use the Internet to access information about fitness testing and then use it to plan and implement the testing in groups of four or five.
172. In Year 13, students' key skills have not yet developed to a level where they are fully enhancing learning. In some cases, students' achievement is restricted by an inability to think logically when justifying their response to challenging questioning of their answers related to achievement motivation in sport.
173. Teaching in the sixth form is, overall, very good. The most effective teaching involves high expectations and a good pace to lessons. Teachers ensure that students understand the intended outcomes of the lesson so that they know what they are expected to learn. There are no strategies in place for challenging gifted students.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies in the sixth form is **satisfactory**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' very good grasp of subject and its teaching.
- The quantity and quality of work put in by staff.
- High quality of teacher-produced resources.
- Links with local business.
- Lack of formative assessment.
- Limited range of teaching and learning resources, within and outside the department.

#### **Commentary**

174. Recently, the success rates in A level business studies at the ends of Years 12 and 13 have been above national expectations and are improving. However, they are not yet consistent or always up to the standard of other sixth form subjects in the school. Partly for this reason, the school has decided to move away from the traditional Advanced Level programme, and the current Year 12 students have just started to study an advanced vocational course: the aim is to increase interest and motivation and improve numbers and standards.
175. The standard of the students' work in the lessons seen is average. At the start of Year 12 the students are already gaining a good grasp of the nature of the different types of business model in the UK; however, they are only beginning to appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of each of these to the various stakeholders. Students at the start of Year 13 are very clear about business models by now, and in their early work on positioning an enterprise in the market can (unusually) relate that process to the type of organisation. It is less clear how well the students retain what they learn, for the teachers do not assess their knowledge and understanding, formally and informally, very frequently. Nor do they drill them in the fundamentals in any way, so their grasp of these is weaker than it should be for high levels of subject understanding and, therefore, of exam success.
176. The students achieve well in the light of their previous standards and subjects of study, though those most able quickly to grasp the ideas and techniques of business studies do not find enough challenge to be able to develop to the highest levels. This is partly because the teachers generally work harder than the students and partly because the students' skills of independent study are not well developed. There is little difference between the achievement of females compared with males.
177. One of the two main subject teachers was unavoidably absent during the inspection; however, it is clear that the quality of business studies teaching is satisfactory, as is the quality of the students' learning. The strengths of teaching are the teachers' subject knowledge (which was very good in the lessons seen), their relationships with the students, medium-term planning, and use of resources (some of which, such as those produced themselves and the growing links with business, including the very successful Young Enterprise scheme, are excellent): these all provide the students with much encouragement to enjoy the subject and to gain in understanding of it. However, there is insufficient drive in lessons to produce the high motivation and challenge needed for really good results. For this reason, and for those mentioned above, there is too little clear encouragement for the students to improve. Also, the range and value of the subject-specific stock in the school library are as yet low and not all the students make as much use of ICT outside of lessons as would bring real benefit; however, the staff are already addressing these and other such resource shortages.

178. The subject is formally led and managed by the head of faculty as both the main teachers have been newly qualified until very recently. However, more and more responsibility is being passed from the former to the latter, and this is entirely successful. The head of faculty is aware of the need to identify areas of specific training still required by the business studies teachers - such as in the principles of efficient and effective curriculum development and the attributes of high quality teaching. It would also be better for the subject to have a permanent teaching base within the school.
179. The school's performance and provision in business studies have improved markedly since the previous inspection, in 1998 (though at that time the sixth form offer was economics rather than business studies as such). The inspectors then found the course to be dry and unexciting and to involve little ICT. None of this is the case now.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is		2
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

<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>2</b>
Students' achievement	3	3

<b>Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2

<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well students learn	2	3
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	2	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2

<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
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).*