

INSPECTION REPORT

BISHOP'S HATFIELD GIRLS' SCHOOL

Hatfield

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117527

Headteacher: Mrs C M Brooks

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 November 2003

Inspection number: 259180

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 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll;	723
School address:	Woods Avenue Hatfield Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL10 8NL
Telephone number:	01707 275331
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Ian Lennox
Date of previous inspection:	16 February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bishop's Hatfield Girls School is an 11-18 comprehensive school and, with 613 pupils in the main school and 110 students in the sixth form, is smaller than most other secondary schools. The school provides for pupils across the ability range, though attainment on entry is average overall. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with statements are below average. Pupils with the highest levels of need mostly have moderate learning, specific learning (dyslexia), or emotional and behavioural difficulties. About 12 per cent of the pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 14 different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school and so there is no significantly large sub-group. While many of these pupils are bilingual, very few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The most frequently spoken home languages, other than English, are Bengali, Urdu and Albanian. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is within the average range. The school became a Beacon School in 2001 and received an achievement award in 2002.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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19399	Linda Aspland	Team inspector	Art Art (sixth form)
19499	Barbara Baughan	Team inspector	English
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form)
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	English as an additional language Modern foreign languages German (sixth form)
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	English (sixth form) Theatre studies (sixth form)
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education Religious education (sixth form)
20619	Jennifer Hazlewood	Team inspector	Information and communication Business studies (sixth form)
15051	Lynne Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History History (sixth form)
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Citizenship Music
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very effective school** and one that provides a very good quality of education for all pupils. The excellent leadership of the headteacher, with very good support from other key staff, ensures that pupils from all groups achieve very well. Standards are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11, and above average at the end of Year 13. Teaching and learning are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The school provides **very good value for money**.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Good and often very good teaching leads to very good achievement and very good test and examination results.
- The excellent leadership of the headteacher and very good leadership of other senior managers ensure that there is a continuous drive for improvement.
- The school makes excellent use of management information to evaluate its work and set clear targets for improvement.
- The very good care, support and guidance provided for pupils are enhanced by the excellent lifeskills programme.
- The library provides excellent support for teaching and learning.
- In a minority of lessons pupils become disinterested and behaviour deteriorates because learning activities are not well matched to their needs.
- Some teachers have difficulty in coping with the very challenging behaviour exhibited by a small minority of pupils.

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have been maintained at a well above average level and achievement is very good. There is now more very good teaching. Assessment information is used with increasing effect to set targets, monitor pupils' progress and evaluate performance. Although no key issues for action were identified in the last inspection report, an action plan was implemented to tackle all minor weaknesses identified in the report. All have been tackled successfully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Standards are **well above average** overall and achievement is **very good**. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average at the end of Year 9. Pupils also achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and GCSE examination results have been maintained at well above average levels since the last inspection. In 2003 the GCSE results were above or well above average in almost all subjects. Sixth form students also achieve very well. The 2003 results rose above the 2002 results, which were average.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **good** in the main school and **very good** in the sixth form. The number of fixed period exclusions is below average for a school of this size. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance is just below the national average in the main school and so unsatisfactory. Pupils' punctuality is satisfactory. In the sixth form, students' attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **very good** because teaching, learning, the curriculum, assessment, and support and guidance are effective and promote very good achievement. There are no major shortcomings in provision but there are some inconsistencies in the management of pupils' behaviour in a few lessons and the accommodation is barely adequate. Very good links with other schools and colleges enhance provision as does the very good range of extra-curricular activities that not only contribute well to the standards attained but also to the enjoyment of school life. Links with the community are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes excellent use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school's links with parents are **good** and links with other schools and colleges are very good. Parents are generally very pleased with the school, although some have concerns about behaviour. Pupils are pleased to attend the school and some would like to see higher standards of behaviour.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that teaching and learning activities are closely matched to the attainment levels of pupils in all lessons.
- Ensure that all staff understand and are fully committed to the agreed school behaviour strategy and that they are provided with appropriate training in order to ensure that they are able to implement the strategy effectively.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of corporate worship for all pupils.

SIXTH FORM

The sixth form provides advanced courses for 111 students, almost all of whom attended the main school before joining the sixth form.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very effective** sixth form that gives very good value for money. The sixth form is very cost-effective. Students achieve very well and receive a very good quality of education. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Examination results in 2003 rose above the results in 2002, which were average. In 2003 almost all students obtained at least pass grades in all of their subjects with a large proportion obtaining higher grades. Very good leadership and management, together with very good teaching and learning, underpin the very good progress that students are making.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning promote very good achievement.
- Students' attitudes are very positive. They are very welcoming to newcomers and provide excellent role models for younger pupils.
- The school has forged a very effective partnership with Oaklands College that extends the range of courses available to sixth formers.

- Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' progress and achievement are very good.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed and takes into account students' views.
- Some lessons are too teacher dominated when teaching groups are very small.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<p>Provision in English is very good. Standards are well above average and teaching and learning are consistently very good. Students' very positive attitudes and their ability to work independently are significant factors in their very good achievement.</p> <p>Provision in German is very good. Results at A-level are above average. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students learn to work independently. Their excellent attitudes and behaviour contribute significantly to their progress.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Provision in mathematics is very good. Teaching is rigorous and prepares students well for examinations. A-level results are above average. An impact of very good teaching is that students learn well and become very good independent learners.</p>
Science	<p>Provision for biology is very good. Examination results are well above average and teaching is very good.</p>
Humanities	<p>Provision in religious education is good. Teaching contributes well to students' achievement. Students develop the skills of analysis and evaluation well and this enables them to become independent learners.</p> <p>Provision in history is good. Increasing numbers are opting for the subject at AS level and good teaching encourages them to become effective, independent learners.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in drama and theatre studies is excellent. Teaching and learning are excellent and every opportunity is taken to enrich the curriculum through visits to theatres and contact with professional actors.</p> <p>Provision for art is good. Good teaching is underpinned by thorough planning to the assessment objectives and is complemented by the particularly creative use of textiles.</p>
Business	<p>Provision in business is good. Teaching is good and well planned with a range of activities to support learning, but there is insufficient planned access to business at first hand. There is very good access to ICT for research and presentation of work.</p>

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive **very good** advice, support and guidance to enable them to choose courses. The very good support they get, together with the very effective system for the setting and monitoring of targets, contribute to the very good progress students make in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are **very good**. The head of the sixth form leads a strong team of tutors who are becoming more central to the monitoring and support of the academic progress and development of sixth form students. Very good attention is given to the students' views. The partnership with Oaklands College extends the range of courses available and the strong links with the college ensure that students' progress in college courses is well monitored.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The majority of students enjoy being in the sixth form, feel that teaching is challenging and their work is helpfully assessed to show how they can improve it. They appreciate the encouragement they receive to study and research topics independently and the help their teachers give them if they have difficulties with their work. Several areas of concern surfaced in the responses to the questionnaire, such as advice about course choices, careers advice, information about progress, and support if they had personal problems. Inspectors spoke with many students and on the whole they did not agree with these criticisms. The overwhelming view was that they are all happy in the school and value what it does for them.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards are **well above average** and achievement is **very good**. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average at the end of Year 9. Pupils also achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and GCSE examination results have been maintained at well above average levels since the last inspection. In 2003 the GCSE results were above or well above average in almost all subjects. Sixth form students also achieve very well. The 2003 results rose above the 2002 results, which were average.

Main school

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is very good and the school maintains well above average standards.
- In the 2003 Year 9 National Curriculum tests standards in English, mathematics, and science were well above average in comparison with all schools and with schools in similar socio-economic circumstances.
- The 2003 GCSE results were well above average in comparison with all schools and very high in comparison with schools with similar attainment levels at the end of Year 9.
- Standards in ICT in Years 10 and 11 are not as high as they should be because of a lack of curriculum time.
- Sixth form students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- The 2003 A-level results show significant improvement on the 2002 results, which were average.

Commentary

1. The standards of attainment of pupils entering the school in Year 7 are broadly average. This has been the case in all years since the last inspection. However, the intake is not balanced and in most years there have been more pupils at the lower rather than the upper end of the attainment range. This means that the school has fewer of the most able students than a typical comprehensive school.
2. Taken together, the school's results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have been maintained at a well above average level since the last inspection. In 2003, the results were well above average both in comparison with all schools and with schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. The results were well above average in English and science and above average in mathematics. In terms of prior attainment these results represent very good achievement in all three subjects. In each of the core subjects, significant proportions of pupils attain the higher Level 6 and above. This shows that the school is working effectively with the more able pupils.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.6 (34.7)	33.3 (34.8)
Mathematics	37.7 (37.6)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	36.5 (36.4)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 117 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average both for the proportions of pupils obtaining five or more grades A* to C and five or more grades A* to G. Value-added measures show that the achievement of this group of pupils was very good. Although, because of differences in the cohorts, the percentages of pupils gaining A* to C grades have varied slightly year on year, the results have been maintained at a well above average level since the last inspection. Analyses of performance show that the achievement of these groups of pupils was also good.
4. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the 2003 GCSE examinations was well above the national average in mathematics, science, design and technology, German, music and physical education, and above average in art, French, religious education, and history. Results were average in English language, English literature and drama, and below average in ICT.
5. Inspection evidence is largely consistent with the test and examination results and shows standards to be well above national expectations in mathematics and geography, and in science in Years 10 and 11. Standards are above expectations in all other subjects, apart from ICT. In ICT, although standards are above expectations in Years 7 to 9 they are closer to expectations in Years 10 and 11. This is largely related to the timetable arrangements for the subject and the structure of the course. Because Year 11 pupils do not have a discrete ICT lesson they find it difficult to complete their examination portfolios, which are based on work done in Years 9 and 10, and to apply the GCSE criteria.
6. Achievement is good in English and pupils become confident speakers and attentive listeners, increasing their range of structures and vocabulary. Their reading skills and their powers of analysis and discrimination develop through the literature they study in class and as they take advantage of the excellent school library. In mathematics, achievement is very good because teachers succeed in interesting and motivating pupils to learn. The development of competence in numeracy is very good in Years 7 to 9 and skills in problem solving are extended well in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good in science and pupils develop their knowledge and skills at a similar rate as their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
7. Standards and achievement in this school are underpinned by good teaching and learning, very good leadership and management and the very effective use of assessment information. All test and examination results are carefully analysed and very good use is made of this information for target setting and for monitoring and evaluating performance. Attainment targets include a reasonable element of challenge and are generally met. This is largely due to the effective monitoring of pupils' progress so that action can be taken if a pupil is underachieving. The analyses of performance show that the vast majority of pupils make very good progress and that the achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs is comparable with that of their peers.
8. Gifted and talented pupils are provided with appropriate challenges in most subjects and they achieve very good standards. Their needs are well met through the school's very good programme of extra-curricular activities and in particular in drama and physical education. However, not enough is done to fully exploit the talents of these pupils in science and ICT.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	65 (64)	58 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (94)	97 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	41.0	36.9

There were 117 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ

assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth form

- Results in the 2002 A-level examinations were average and represented very good achievement when compared with students' attainment on entry to the school. Results in 2003 show significant improvement on the previous year; almost all students obtained pass grades in all their subjects and more than 62 per cent of all passes were at Grade A or B.
- Standards seen during the inspection are well above course expectations in English, mathematics and biology, and above expectations in most other subjects apart from history and religious studies where they are in line with expectations. Very good teaching and the insistence that students become independent learners are driving standards up. Achievement in general is very good and in no subject is it less than good. The very effective assessment and monitoring procedures are major factors in this improvement.

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	97.4	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	46.1	39.4
Average point score per student	264.5	263.3

There were 44 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points

- Students demonstrate effective study skills and the ability to work independently. They have very good skills in literacy and, in many subjects, take notes and write well. Students make effective use of their very good mathematical skills and good ICT skills in research and presentation.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **good** in the main school and **very good** in the sixth form. The number of fixed period exclusions is below average for a school of this size. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance is just below the national average in the main school and so unsatisfactory. Pupils' punctuality is satisfactory. In the sixth form, students' attendance and punctuality are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The vast majority of pupils have good attitudes to their work and learning. They are keen to take responsibility and are very quick to use their initiative.
- Behaviour in most lessons and around the school is good.
- The very good provision for pupils' moral and social development helps them to respect the feelings of others and distinguish right from wrong.
- Some pupils lose too much time at school as a result of parentally condoned absence.
- A very small minority of pupils openly challenge their teacher's authority and disrupt the learning of others.
- Sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the school. They have very good attitudes to their work and show much independence in their learning.
- The attendance of sixth form students is good and lessons begin on time.

Commentary

Main school

- The school promotes a strong desire to learn in the vast majority of pupils. Pupils enjoy coming to school and have good attitudes towards their work. The quality of teaching is good and, by providing interesting and stimulating lessons, teachers ensure that the majority of pupils are

absorbed in their learning and behave well. In lessons, pupils often work together co-operatively, asking questions and sharing ideas. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and most pupils understand exactly how they should, and should not, behave. Most pupils respond well to the school's high expectations and there are numerous examples of good and very good behaviour both in lessons and around the school generally. This good behaviour has a positive effect on standards and achievement, the quality of learning and the atmosphere in the school. In a few lessons, however, some pupils are unsettled and noisy, often exasperating their more committed classmates. This usually happens when there is a temporary teacher or when the set work is too easy, or pupils are unsure of the purpose of the work.

13. The school takes its responsibilities for social inclusion very seriously and works hard to maintain pupils in full-time education. However, there is a very small minority of pupils who are unwilling to conform to the school's high expectations of behaviour and whose challenging behaviour disrupts teaching and learning. Although during the inspection several of these instances occurred when temporary or newly appointed teachers were taking lessons, there were a few instances where even the most experienced teachers had difficulty in managing the behaviour of these pupils. Because of this the number of fixed period exclusions, although below average for schools of similar size, has been rising over recent years, and it was necessary to exclude one pupil permanently during the last school year. This was the first permanent exclusion for many years. The school works hard and involves parents as much as possible in order to prevent such behaviour recurring.
14. Relationships between pupils and with adults are good and are characterised by mutual trust, respect and consideration. However, the analysis of the pupils' questionnaire showed that many said they knew of incidents of bullying and racist abuse. The inspection team explored this issue in formal and informal discussions with many pupils during the inspection. Pupils were generally surprised by the response to the questionnaire and said that such incidents are rare and when they do occur involve a very small number of pupils. The school attaches great urgency to such issues and deals with them immediately. Teachers encourage pupils to report any incidents of harassment and the system is working well. During discussions with inspectors, pupils from ethnic minority groups said that they felt well looked after and that any incidents involving racism were very rare, and handled effectively by staff.
15. There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and they respond to them with enthusiasm. Each class votes for its own form captain and vice-captain, games captain and school council representative. The school council provides pupils with a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the school and its development.
16. One of the issues the school has to tackle is a gradual fall in the attendance rate. This was just below the national average in the last reporting year and caused by an increase in the number of authorised absences through illness.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.2	School data	0.1
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

17. Religious education provides very good opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils and opportunities are provided in other subjects to enhance this feature of personal development. Pupils have a respect for the beliefs of others and have a clear understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and develop an understanding of different faiths. They are well aware of right and wrong actions and have a very clear knowledge of what is expected of them. This knowledge and awareness is reflected well in their actions and the concern they show for

others in the school community. Pupils are keen to be involved in a range of activities, and they relate very well to adults and their peers. Pupils work well together and many opportunities are provided for them to express their views in paired work, group work and general discussion. Pupils are self-confident and are developing well as responsible members of the community. Pupils are aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. However, their cultural development does not extend sufficiently to develop an awareness and appreciation of the rich variety of different cultures and traditions that exist in this country. The lack of co-ordination of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development across the curriculum works against a planned approach to this aspect of pupils' personal development.

Sixth form

18. Students are highly motivated in their studies and are very eager to learn. They are enjoying this part of their education and are very willing to take on positions of responsibility. Links with the main school are strong and students contribute in many ways. For example, many students are linked to a particular Year 7 tutor group and join them once a week during registration. They help new pupils to settle in and Year 7 pupils speak warmly of the support they receive. Students also run the 'REACT' group, which acts as a peer support group for younger pupils, and lead the sixth form and whole school councils. Students are very mature in their approach towards learning. Teachers provide regular opportunities for them to work independently and they can be relied upon to make constructive use of this time.
19. Attendance in the sixth form as a whole is above average and students are very punctual in their arrival at school for registration and for lessons. Although attendance is very good in Year 13, Year 12 is much lower. This is because a small number of Year 12 students have poor attendance and this depresses the overall average. The attendance of the vast majority is above average.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	553	25	1
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	7	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	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0
Chinese	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	92	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **very good** because teaching, learning, the curriculum, assessment, and support and guidance are effective and promote very good achievement. There are no major shortcomings in provision but there are some inconsistencies in the management of pupils' behaviour in a few lessons and the accommodation is barely adequate. Very good links with other schools and colleges enhance provision as does the very good range of extra-curricular activities that not only contribute well to the standards attained but also to the enjoyment of school life. Links with the community are good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **good** in the main school and **very good** in the sixth form. The **very good** use of assessment to help to maintain and further raise standards is one reason why pupils' achievement is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most lessons are very well planned to encourage and actively engage pupils in learning.
- Assessment is used very well to support and improve pupils' progress and achievement.
- Homework is used very well to consolidate and extend pupils' learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning in citizenship is excellent.
- In some lessons, pupils' behaviour deteriorates because learning activities do not offer enough challenge.
- The quality of teaching in ICT was unsatisfactory during the inspection.
- Very good teaching in the sixth form ensures that learning and progress are very good.
- Teachers' very good subject command and their expectations that students will become independent learners are major factors in the very good achievement in the sixth form.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 155 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8 (5%)	61 (39%)	57 (37%)	25 (16%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

Main school

20. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. There is more very good teaching with occasional examples of excellence. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is about the same. The drive to improve the quality of teaching has been led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team who have given the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning a high priority. The outcome of this is that teaching is good across the different year groups. In the vast majority of lessons, learning activities are carefully structured to challenge and interest pupils. Only in the discrete ICT lessons observed during the inspection was the quality of teaching judged to be unsatisfactory. This was largely because of the disruption caused by the specialist teacher's absence through illness. Teacher assessments and evidence from pupils' work indicates that the quality of teaching is usually satisfactory or better.
21. Pupils' learning benefits from good, very well planned teaching. The school is conscious of the need to promote race equality and teaching takes account of pupils' ethnic origins and

individual beliefs, customs and traditions. As a result all groups of pupils achieve well. In the vast majority of lessons pupils are fully engaged because the learning activities are well matched to their needs. Teaching in the best lessons is characterised by the effective use of the teacher's subject expertise to provide clear explanations and high expectations of work and behaviour. In almost all lessons good progress is made because pupils rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was seen in all subjects and particularly in teaching in citizenship, and in some excellent lessons observed in English, history and design and technology.

EXAMPLES OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

Example of outstanding practice

Year 8 – Exemplary practice in history

TITLE: How feasible would it be to convert England to Roman Catholicism? What should Mary do?

OBJECTIVE: An enquiry based approach for a mixed ability Year 8 class, attempting to answer the two questions above.

DESCRIPTION: The challenging learning agenda was shared with the class. Paired pupils discussed each evidence card in turn to a strict time limit before allocating it to one of two categories of 'feasible' and 'not feasible'. Having compiled their lists pupils were then challenged to interpret the evidence in such a way that the card could be assigned to the opposing list. Plentiful praise for pupils' contributions and judicious intervention on the part of the teacher stimulated high level creative thinking by pupils about Mary's prospects of successfully reintroducing Catholicism and led them to a very clear understanding of how evidence can be interpreted in different ways. The emphasis on thinking and oral contributions, combined with partially completed lists, writing frames and sentence starters for pupils with special educational needs, enabled pupils of all ability levels to learn very clearly about the tenuous and frequently ambiguous nature of historical evidence.

22. In most lessons, teachers transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject and succeed in capturing pupils' interest and enthusiasm. This is seen in modern foreign languages where pupils make good progress because teachers successfully transmit their own enthusiasm for language learning. Because of inspiring and highly effective teaching in citizenship lessons, pupils become engrossed in the subject and develop a wide appreciation of contemporary social issues. Many religious education lessons have a pace and liveliness that encourages pupils to express their views and to challenge each other's thinking. The school is now beginning to implement strategies to share this very good practice more widely in the school.
23. The school carries out detailed analyses of pupils' performance in tests and examinations and this information is presented to subject leaders who make very good use of it in the planning of teaching and learning. The very good quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' work, by which strengths and weaknesses are noted and targets for improvement are set, contributes significantly to the very good progress pupils make. The very effective use of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning also makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement.
24. There were three unsatisfactory lessons in ICT and one in English. Common features in these lessons, and in some lessons that were otherwise satisfactory, were a lack of challenge and unclear learning objectives. These lessons comprise a series of activities that do not build in a systematic way towards the achievement of learning goals. Because of this, pupils are uncertain what the learning objectives are, the lesson pace is too slow and pupils waste time on activities not related to the lesson. As a result a disproportionate amount of teacher time is spent on managing behaviour in the lesson.
25. Teaching is good for pupils who have special educational needs. It is very good when special needs teachers work with pupils individually in the progress unit and it is good when teaching assistants support them in mainstream classrooms. Subject teachers are fully informed on the needs of pupils and account is taken of the objectives of pupils' individual education plans in lesson planning.

26. Literacy is developed well in most subjects, with good strategies in place to extend the use of language. Mathematical skills are above average and practised regularly in other subjects. Most subjects encourage the use of ICT and it is particularly well used in science and design and technology. However, not enough use is made of ICT in music and art.

Sixth form

27. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good across most subjects and excellent in the drama and theatre studies course. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in drama and theatre studies and in sociology at Oaklands College. Work is well matched to students' needs and in most subjects there is an emphasis on independent learning that students recognise is preparing them well for higher education and employment. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. Many lessons are characterised by lively and thoughtful discussion, with the teacher taking a back seat to enable students to develop and test their own ideas. Underpinning this very good teaching is the excellent knowledge of and enthusiasm for their subjects that teachers use to motivate and interest their students. This increases their commitment and encourages them to work to the best of their ability. In the few lessons where teaching was satisfactory rather than good or better the main reason was that with some very small groups teachers tended to keep too much control and did not allow students to develop their own ideas.
28. The use of assessment and the subject review procedures support students' learning and progress very effectively. These reviews allow for all students to have regular one-to-one interviews with each of their subject teachers and with their tutor to discuss achievements and set targets. Lecturers follow the same process with students taking courses at Oaklands College and this enables the school to maintain an overview of students' progress. Students value these procedures and recognise that this openness encourages them to take responsibility for themselves and to understand how to improve further.

The curriculum

The curriculum is broad and provides well for pupils' needs and requirements. The shared teaching arrangements in the sixth form provide students with an extended range of options. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs. Provision for personal, social and health education, and citizenship is excellent. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Staffing and resources are good. The accommodation is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A broad curriculum with equal opportunities for all promotes very good achievement.
- The excellent 'life skills' programme, which includes personal, social and health education (PSHE), careers education and citizenship, makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Provision for religious education is good, but pupils do not receive their entitlement to a daily act of collective worship.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Enrichment opportunities for learning outside the school day are very good.
- Aspects of the accommodation for physical education and design and technology restrict learning opportunities.
- The sixth form curriculum is very good for advanced level students and the range of courses is extended through the strong links with Oaklands College.
- The school offers sixth form students a good key skills programme to support their work in advanced courses.

Commentary

Main school

29. The school provides equal access to a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities in the main school. All statutory requirements are met with the exception of collective worship and most subjects receive the recommended teaching time allocation. The curriculum is supplemented by religious education and life skills. The life skills programme, which is taught in all years, is excellent both in terms of its planning and the quality of teaching. Pupils benefit from being taught French and German from Year 7 and this continues in Years 10 to 11 where it is possible for pupils to study both languages to GCSE level. The school manages innovation well. The National Key Stage 3 strategy has been introduced in English, mathematics and science, and is having a positive impact on standards. The strategy is now being extended to other subjects. The start to the ICT strategy has been delayed because of staff absence. However, pupils' ICT skills have improved since the last inspection because of improvements in resources and increased use of the ICT suites.
30. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides a good range of optional subjects but, apart from a health and social care GCSE, which can lead to vocational courses in further education, there are no vocational courses. Senior management and governors have decided that this range of courses is best suited to the pupils' needs. However, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is under constant review and the need to provide more flexible opportunities for pupils who are more suited to an alternative curriculum form part of school improvement planning.
31. The school meets the statutory requirements with regard to pupils' statements of special educational needs. The Code of Practice is implemented effectively and these pupils have equal access to all areas of the curriculum, including extra-curricular activities. Provision is based on the need to raise standards of literacy and numeracy as soon as possible. Curriculum arrangements reflect this priority, with emphasis given to support in the lower age groups. This is effective. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and reviews of individual education plans and statements are conducted according to requirements. Pupil information is updated and circulated both directly and on the school Intranet.
32. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities that considerably enrich pupils' learning and extend achievement opportunities. In addition to the many school clubs, there are regular field trips and visits to places of interest at home and abroad. There are particularly high participation rates in drama and sporting activities and pupils perform to high standards. Sixth form students lead many of the activities and provide very good role models for younger pupils. Pupils and students are themselves ready to take the initiative to start a club, for example, a school Christian Union has recently been started by students, prompted by visits made to different faith centres like the London Mosque. The additional use that pupils make of the ICT rooms at lunchtimes and after school makes a positive contribution to the development of their computing skills. The school choir, orchestra and other instrumental and singing groups provide good opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their musical skills.
33. Staffing is good in the majority of departments and very good in mathematics, history and design and technology. In the majority of subjects staff expertise and knowledge meets the needs of the curriculum well, and this underpins pupils' success in tests and examinations. Because of promotions and retirements there have been more changes in the teachers employed in the school over the last two years than in previous years. These changes have been managed well, and teachers new to the school speak highly of the very good induction and support they receive. The school has also had to cope with the staffing consequences of several long-term absences through illness. These absences have impacted at all levels and are having a detrimental effect on teaching and learning in ICT. Support staff make a good contribution to pupils' learning and contribute well to the smooth operation of practical work in science, design and technology, art and ICT. The chartered librarian and careers teachers

provide expert support for pupils and students. The school makes very good use of the services of a school nurse and a school counsellor.

34. Resources for learning are good. The school operates a well considered and equitable system for devolving the resource budget to subjects and as a result resources are good in all subjects. The school has invested substantially in ICT over recent years and the ratio of computers to pupils is now better than the national average. The school library provides an excellent learning resource. The well qualified school librarian provides a high quality service and ensures that the range of books, journals, computer software and other resources meet the needs of subjects.
35. The quality of the accommodation is generally satisfactory for the needs of the curriculum. As a result of recent refurbishments, the accommodation for science, design and technology and ICT has been considerably improved. However there is a general shortage of space with several rooms too small for the size of teaching groups. The indoor accommodation for teaching physical education is inadequate and restricts the range of activities that can be taught. Because the school hall joins the dining area it is necessary to use the gymnasium on an increasing number of occasions for examinations. This also restricts learning opportunities in the subject. The accommodation for food and textiles is good but the accommodation for graphics and resistant materials is unsatisfactory and impedes learning. Administrative space is also inadequate, with some offices being located in corridors. Displays are used effectively throughout the school to celebrate pupils' work, inform pupils about activities and act as a stimulus.

Sixth form

36. The strong links with Oaklands College enable the school to offer a very good range of courses to advanced level GCE students. Vocational courses in school are now limited to business. Other vocational courses have been discontinued because the size of groups made them too expensive to run although students who wish to follow a programme combining A-level and vocational courses are able to do so by attending college for part of their provision and several do so.
37. The key skills of communication, application of number, and information technology are taught as separate courses. Although some students question the need for such courses the lessons seen suggest that the courses are taught well and provide a useful experience for most students. In response to students' concerns the school has introduced a more flexible approach to students' individual key skills programmes. There is no regular space for physical education on the timetable, but there are good opportunities for interested students to participate in extra-curricular sport.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are **very good**. The school provides **very good** support, advice and guidance and involves pupils and students very well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school looks after its pupils very well; health and safety and child protection procedures are comprehensive and very effective.
- Pupils benefit from the very good personal and academic support, advice and guidance the school provides.
- Well-planned induction procedures and good support from sixth form students help new pupils and students to settle quickly.
- The school actively seeks pupils' and students' views and accommodates their suggestions and preferences whenever possible.

- Pupils and students receive very good guidance on opportunities for further study and career opportunities and this helps them to make well-informed choices.

Commentary

Main school

38. The strengths in care, support and guidance noted in the last report have been maintained. Pupils are very well looked after during the school day and they receive very good personal support and guidance. Child protection and health and safety procedures are thorough and are fully understood by the relevant members of staff. The school liaises well with a range of external agencies, including social services, the school psychological service and health services, and counselling is available for any pupils or students who are experiencing personal difficulties.
39. Very good liaison with contributing primary schools and well-planned transfer arrangements ensure a smooth transition when pupils enter the school in Year 7. Once they arrive at the start of the school year, sixth form students help in a number of ways. For example, they encourage younger pupils with their reading and, during registration, they formally record any 'excellent' or 'commended' marks pupils receive. These rewards are totalled at the end of each school term and are very effective in maintaining pupil motivation. Through the REACT group, older pupils in Years 10 and 11 and students in the sixth form provide lunchtime 'drop-in' sessions for anyone who wants to discuss a problem or seek reassurance. This provides a very useful early warning of any instances of bullying. Pupils in Year 7 speak warmly of the support they receive and this helps them to make good progress in their work. Working relationships are good and pupils say that their teachers are kind and very approachable. Inspectors agree with these positive comments.
40. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic achievements and personal development are thorough and help teachers to provide very good support, advice and guidance. Teachers mark pupils' work very carefully and provide pupils with clear guidance on how they can improve their work. Assessment information is used very well to set individual targets and to identify and address underachievement at an early stage. This is a strength of the school.
41. The school actively seeks pupils' views and, wherever possible, acts upon them. The school council is well regarded and pupils have been able to bring about several improvements. Members of staff trust pupils and put them in positions of real responsibility. For example, each year the council receives a sum of money that is to be used for projects that benefit the whole school. Representatives consult their class and collectively establish common priorities; in this way, pupils have real influence over certain spending decisions and the on-going development of the school. This encourages responsible decision making as part of pupils' personal development.
42. Teachers provide pupils with much detailed information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11 and beyond. For example, all Year 9 pupils attend the annual 'Insight into Industry' conference. This two-day conference gives pupils the opportunity to work collaboratively on a variety of relevant activities and helps to strengthen their understanding of the importance of business and industry. Links with Oaklands Further Education College and Connexions are strong and work experience placements at the end of Year 10 give pupils a good insight into the many opportunities that are available once they have left school.

Sixth form

43. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and they speak warmly of the personal and academic support that their teachers provide. Inspectors agree with these positive views. Teachers have established a very good balance between encouraging students to work independently, while always remaining available to advise on a problem. Students' work is very closely monitored and the system is underpinned by regular one-to-one subject reviews with their

teachers. These meetings are supplemented each term by 'quick assessments'. These monitoring systems complement each other very well; they enable tutors to track each student's progress and help to keep parents closely in touch with how their children are getting along.

44. Students are very pleased to be treated as responsible young adults and they have numerous opportunities to involve themselves with the rest of the school. They run both the sixth form and whole school councils and ensure an effective channel for pupils' and students' views. Supported by representatives from each class, they establish whole school priorities for improvement and spend funds delegated to the school council in the most effective way. Students spoken to during the inspection are very pleased to be given such a responsibility and enjoy being able to shape the development priorities of the school.
45. Students receive very good advice and guidance on careers and higher or further education, and undertake a week's work experience in Year 12. Close links with Oaklands College enable them to study an enhanced range of subjects and they also appreciate being able to attend a higher education convention at the University of Hertfordshire.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents receive very good information about the school and the progress their children are making.
- Parents support their children well in their learning.
- Links with other schools and colleges are very good.
- Very good links with local universities prepare students very well for the next stage of their education.

Commentary

Main school

46. The school is keen to work closely with parents and keeps them very well informed about school matters. The headteacher issues regular newsletters and these, along with the school website, provide parents with detailed information about day-to-day events in school life. They also include advance notification of the work pupils will be covering and this puts parents in a good position to be able to support their children's learning at home. Pupils' annual reports give parents a good idea of how their children are getting along with their work and these are supplemented during the autumn and spring terms by 'quick assessments'. These reports provide a brief overview of how each individual is getting along and helps to keep parents up-to-date with the progress their child is making.
47. Parents are pleased with many areas of the school's work and have many opportunities to become actively involved with their children's education. They may, for example, provide practical support for the school's many extra-curricular activities or help with the school association. Parents make a good contribution to their children's learning and this encourages them to work hard and do their very best.
48. The school has very effective links with contributing primary schools, a nearby special school and with other secondary schools within the Hatfield area. The sharing of good practice is part of the school's culture. For example, the school's exceptionally good and effective citizenship programme has been shared with four other local secondary schools. Expertise is also shared through the school's Beacon activities, the sixth form consortium and the networked learning

community activities. In addition the school is involved with the 'Hatfield Ahead' project; this is a scheme that enables participating schools to share effective practice and to raise aspirations amongst primary school pupils and their parents.

Sixth form

49. The school is a member of the local post-16 consortium and it works in very close co-operation with other sixth form centres and Oaklands College of Further Education. All members of the consortium work together to provide a very well co-ordinated programme of advanced, intermediate and foundation courses. Students feel that the very wide range of opportunities suits their interests and talents well and that the information provided about the various courses is clear and helpful. Students who are undertaking courses at other centres say that they are very pleased with the link arrangements that have been made on their behalf.
50. Links with higher education are strong and representatives from the University of Hertfordshire visit in order to give students a useful insight into the range of courses available.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes excellent use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership by the headteacher ensures that there is a sharp focus on achieving the highest possible standards.
- The school makes excellent use of performance information to evaluate its work.
- The quality of leadership and management of staff with key roles is very good.
- The school benefits from the good support of governors.
- Standards in ICT are adversely affected by the temporary absence of the head of department.
- Very good leadership and management of the sixth form are extending the role of sixth form tutors.
- The head of sixth form maintains very good links with Oaklands College to ensure that students are very well supported.
- Sixth form leadership and management maintain a clear focus on the needs of the individual.

Commentary

Main school

51. The headteacher provides the school with excellent leadership. Her very clear commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards in all areas of the school's work is seen in the school's evaluation procedures, which are effective and firmly embedded in the school's practice. One of the outstanding features of the school's evaluation procedures is the systematic analysis and effective use of performance and other management information. Because of this the school has a very clear picture of its strengths and is able to tackle weaknesses. For example, although the last inspection report concluded that the strengths of the school were such that there were no key issues for action, the senior leadership team and governors worked closely through the report and identified any reference to a weakness. An action plan was then devised and all of these weaknesses have been tackled successfully. Systematic action such as this underpins pupils' very good achievement and the well above average standards in external tests and examinations. Other key staff share the headteacher's vision and work hard in their own areas of responsibility to achieve the school's targets. Subject leadership is excellent in citizenship and drama and theatre studies, and good or very good in almost all other subjects. At the time of the inspection subject leadership in ICT was adversely affected by the absence through illness of the head of department.

52. The management of the school is very good. The system for line management from the leadership team to the other levels of management is very effective in achieving consistency in standards and practices across the school. Performance management is fully implemented. A comprehensive assessment database has been established and excellent use is made of this information by the senior leadership team and heads of department. Detailed analyses of pupils' performance are undertaken and trends in performance are closely scrutinised as part of the review process with heads of department. This, together with the very effective use of assessment information within departments for monitoring the progress of individuals and groups of pupils makes a significant contribution to standards and achievement. The school improvement plan is comprehensive, contains appropriate targets and is closely linked to department plans. Planning for improvement in subject departments is generally good at all levels.
53. Governors are very supportive of the school and carry out their statutory duties well. They are committed to the school's drive to maintain and further raise standards, and fully endorse the principle of ensuring that the school provides for the needs of all groups of pupils. They fully support the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The finance committee monitors the budget with care and as a result they have targeted expenditure according to priorities in the school improvement plan. Best value principles are applied to all spending. However, there is no established process that enables the governing body to plan budget income and expenditure beyond a year at a time. Governors participated in the school's self evaluation processes and as a result have a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors have had many discussions about the need to provide a daily act of corporate worship. They have decided, reluctantly, that the lack of a large indoor space prevents them from doing so. The work of the governors is therefore unsatisfactory in this respect.
54. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is well led and managed. The special educational needs co-ordinator effectively leads and manages an effective team of teachers and support assistants who are fully committed to including all pupils with special educational needs in the learning activities the school offers. The clarity of the documentation and the quality of the information the department provides to teachers makes a significant contribution to the very good progress made by pupils with special needs.

Sixth form

55. The sixth form is led and managed very well. Particular strengths are the teamwork of the head of sixth form and her experienced and committed tutors and the management of the subject review procedures, which have a significant impact on attainment and achievement. The new head of sixth form is maintaining the very effective links with Oaklands College to ensure that students who attend courses there are well monitored and supported. She is extending the role of tutors to make them more central in the monitoring of students' academic progress and making changes to the life skills programme in response to students' views. Through all her dealings with students, the constant focus is on the needs of the individual.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,470,954	Balance from previous year	96,412
Total expenditure	2,303,656	Balance carried forward to the next	263,710
Expenditure per pupil	3,186		

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

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the faculty are very strong. The clear organisation and structure that underpins the work of the faculty has ensured pupils' continued success in the subject.
- The faculty makes very productive use of the school's analysis of the assessment of results and pupil attainment. Teachers have very good knowledge of individual pupil attainment and work with it accordingly.
- Well-focused homework plays an important part in developing in pupils a capacity for independent learning.
- Some units of work in Years 7 and 8 do not take enough account of the full range of ability in the classes.

Commentary

56. The standards pupils attain in the subject are good. Although results fluctuate slightly from year to year, the school has regularly reached levels in English that are above the national averages in the National Curriculum tests taken in Year 9, with outstanding success in 2003. The most recent results in English and English literature GCSE examinations, taken by all pupils in Year 11, were in line with national averages in the range A* to C. In 2002 they were above average, with a proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades, A*, A and B well above average. The work seen during the inspection confirms these standards.
57. These results represent good achievement. The levels reached by pupils entering the school in Year 7 are just average. Work seen during the inspection showed that the progress they make exceeds expectations. They become confident speakers and attentive listeners, increasing their range of structures and vocabulary. Their reading skills and their powers of analysis and discrimination develop through the literature they study in class and as they take advantage of the excellent school library. They become more purposeful in their writing by exploring a range of forms and styles and by learning to draft and redraft their work, to use dictionaries and to take pride in presentation. Pupils who have not reached appropriate levels in reading and writing by the time they join the school receive intensive help from the support department. They too make good progress.
58. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and are ambitious for their success. Pupils respond well to the clearly structured lessons, which start with an explanation of the objectives they must work towards and end with a review of what has taken place. Relationships are very good and, for the most part, so is behaviour. The very high quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' work, by which strengths and weaknesses are noted and targets for improvement are set, contributes significantly to the good progress made. Well-focused homework tasks extend the work done in class and develop in the pupils the skills of independent learning. From Year 9 pupils are grouped according to their attainment. There is very good collaboration between subject and support staff to support pupils in the lower attaining sets in order that they are able to follow the full

National Curriculum. In Years 7 and 8 pupils are in mixed ability classes. Some of the teaching seen in these younger classes did not take enough account of the range of learning needs.

59. Leadership and management of the faculty are very good. The head of faculty has long experience in the school and she gives clear guidance and strong support to her team, most of whom hold part time posts and have joined the school only recently. The scheme of work embraces all requirements of the National Curriculum and of the external examinations; it is systematic, intelligent and imaginative and is under constant review and development by all members of the team. Space and resources are very well managed, and the classrooms and surrounding area in the faculty base are attractive and stimulating. The faculty has maintained the strengths described in the last inspection report and in addition has improved the structure of lessons and the use of ICT.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

60. Standards of literacy are above average. Pupils entering the school each year bring with them a wide range of skills and experience in reading and writing. There is always a significant minority who have not achieved appropriate levels for their age, and a further minority group who are ahead of expectations, especially in reading. All faculties take responsibility for developing the skills of literacy. Library lessons in Year 7 introduce pupils not only to the very wide range of books available for them but also teach them how to use books and information technology for their independent research. All subject teachers focus pupils' attention on the vocabulary and structures needed for their part of the curriculum. Subjects such as history, geography and religious education – as well as English – help pupils develop ideas through extended writing. In the modern languages faculty there is a strong focus on how language works.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at GCSE are well above average in German and above average in French.
- Standards are above average at the end of Year 9, with a steadily rising trend.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and achieve well in both languages.
- Very good leadership and management provide clear direction for raising standards, so that there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.
- Effective teaching makes pupils want to learn, but the quality of teaching is inconsistent.

Commentary

61. All pupils study both French and German in Years 7 to 9. Teachers' assessments show standards to be well above average in both languages, with a rising trend as more pupils reach the higher levels. At GCSE, pupils do better in languages than in most subjects. In 2003, the number of pupils gaining the highest grades, A* and A, was significantly higher than the national average in both subjects, indicating very good achievement not only by higher attaining pupils, but also but by average attainers. These outcomes indicate very good achievement across the full range of ability throughout Years 7 to 11.
62. In lessons and work seen, standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average. Comprehension skills are strong because vocabulary is learned and tested systematically, and because pupils hear a lot of French and German in most lessons. Most written work is descriptive, but accurate. Pupils exchange information in pairs and groups, building confidence in speaking and

pronouncing well. Almost all pupils achieve standards above expectations. In Years 10 and 11, pupils converse at greater length. In both speaking and writing, they begin to apply their own ideas as they become less dependent on teachers. Writing extends to accounts in various tenses, for example of a catastrophic weekend. Increasing confidence with tenses and structures supports understanding of longer written and spoken passages. All pupils continue with language study, and an encouraging number take two. In this context, standards are above average and achievement exceeds expectations. The inspection took place early in the school year, accounting for the difference in standards seen, as opposed to those indicated by examination results.

63. The quality of teaching and learning is good, more consistently so in German. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. In the best lessons pupils learn particularly well because the teacher transmits enthusiasm for language learning in pacey, well planned activities, which give them lots of opportunities to use the language for themselves. A Year 7 class had great fun as they learned to ask for and give information about themselves and their family. However, in less successful lessons the pace is slow, work is sometimes unchallenging and teachers lower their expectations by using too much English, or translating the foreign language. In these lessons, pupils have to think less and do not use the language sufficiently to boost standards and confidence. Marking is helpful and good use is made of homework to accelerate learning. Increasing use is made of ICT, which supports independent learning in Years 9 to 11. Very good relationships, which foster pupils' positive attitudes, support learning well.
64. The work of the faculty is very well led and managed. Documentation supports teaching and learning very effectively. Good monitoring and evaluation procedures underpin incisive forward planning. There is clear direction for how the subject should be taught, and excellent commitment to meeting the needs and entitlement of individual pupils, for example by the choice of an alternative GCSE course to cater for lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs. A strength in management is the provision of fine supporting resources to help pupils with homework and examination preparation. Currently, time is not available for lesson observation to share very good practice in teaching, which would help to iron out inconsistencies. Good assessment procedures, and extra-curricular activities support learning well. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, especially in the key area of attainment.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average.
- Pupils' achievement is very good.
- Very good teaching succeeds in motivating pupils to learn.
- The key learning points are not summarised and reviewed at the end of some lessons.

Commentary

65. Results in National Curriculum tests for Year 9 pupils in 2003 were well above the national average at Levels 5 and 6. A significant proportion of pupils achieved the higher Levels 7 and 8. The 2003 results were similar to those in 2002, which were also well above the national average. This represents very good achievement.
66. Standards seen in lessons are well above national expectations and match those achieved by pupils in national tests. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good, because learning is interesting and teaching engages and motivates them to learn. Pupils build their knowledge and understanding systematically during these years to become mathematically confident. They are numerically very competent and apply their skills in other subjects well.

67. Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2003 were well above the national average for A* to C grades and virtually all students achieved a grade in the A* to E range. The proportion achieving the highest A* or A grades exceeded the national average. This represents very good achievement.
68. In Years 10 and 11 pupils' achievement is very good. All pupils who achieve above the national average at the end of Year 9 go on to achieve the higher grades at the end of Year 11. The work seen during the inspection indicates that standards are similar to those achieved in examinations. In most groups, pupils are achieving very good standards because they are motivated by consistently good teaching that is rigorous. Teachers make very effective use of information on individual pupil performance to plan lessons that match the group and the needs of individual pupils.
69. Pupils with special educational needs achieve similar standards to their peers at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Those pupils with English as an additional language make very good progress with their learning and achieve equally as high standards as their peers. Standards in mathematics since the last inspection have improved steadily by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
70. The quality of teaching is very good, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In most lessons, teachers effectively use aspects of the good practice outlined in the National Strategy for mathematics. Lessons begin with a useful warm up activity that engages pupils from the start. However, in a few lessons learning was not consolidated by a review of the learning objectives at the end. Effective use is made of mini white boards, graphical calculators and ICT to enhance pupils' learning. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to ensure pupils are well prepared for forthcoming examinations. Homework is used appropriately to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. Teachers know pupils well and the good relationships ensure that individuals are well supported and helped. In a few lessons, learning was restricted because the pace was slow and the range of activities too limited.
71. Pupils with special educational needs are well known to teachers and where there is additional support in the form of learning support assistants they make good progress with their learning. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar good progress to their peers.
72. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a clear vision for the development of the subject with a focus on extending students' learning by increasing the use of information communication technology. There is a strong team of experienced specialist teachers who support each other well. Very good analysis of pupil performance ensures that teachers should be well placed to plan lessons that match the needs of the group, and where appropriate extend higher attaining pupils. Progress since the last inspection is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

73. Standards of numeracy are above average. Pupils have a good command of number facts and are able to tackle numerical calculations in different situations. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented well within mathematics and other subjects have begun to incorporate strategies to support the systematic development of numeracy in their schemes of work. There is very good practice in science, geography and design and technology, and good use is made of mathematical skills in the teaching of ICT.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results are above average at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Achievement from Year 7 to Year 11 is very good.
- Procedures for assessment are excellent and are used very well to improve the progress of pupils.
- Leadership and management in the science department are very good, leading to improved standards.
- Further improvement is needed in the provision for gifted and talented pupils.

Commentary

74. Standards of work are above average at the end of Year 9 and well above average at the end of Year 11. These standards are being maintained because teaching is good. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The department has been recognised as a 'leading science department' in Hertfordshire.
75. In 2003, test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were above average at Level 5, and above, but well above average at Level 6, and above. When compared with similar schools, results were well above average. Science results were not as good as those for English and mathematics. Teachers accurately assessed the attainment of pupils in Year 9. Since the last inspection, results have improved at a rate which was higher than average. Achievement between Years 7 and 9, was good and was very good for higher-attaining girls.
76. GCSE examination results, in 2003, were well above average. When compared with other similar schools, results were also well above average. Since the last inspection results have varied slightly but they have not changed significantly. When compared with test results at the end of Year 9, these results represent achievement, which is very good.
77. As a result of good teaching, pupils are making good gains in their scientific knowledge. For example, by the end of Year 9, higher-attaining pupils can use chemical symbols and formulae and have a good understanding of how colours are reflected from a surface or transmitted through coloured filters. Lower-attaining pupils are less secure in their understanding of science but can, for example, explain how light is reflected or refracted. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 write balanced chemical equations and have a good understanding of basic genetics. Lower-attaining students, however, whilst still achieving average standards, are less secure in their knowledge and understanding. On the whole, students, throughout the school, achieve very well and make very good progress. The standards of literacy and numeracy throughout the school are at least good and sometimes very good.
78. Teaching is good and in some lessons it is very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Pupils learn well as a result. The principal features of teaching were the use of good subject knowledge by teachers, their high expectations of pupils, good, well-focused planning and, in many lessons, a range of methods which maintained interest and engendered learning. Homework was set which extended or consolidated classwork. The identification of appropriate learning objectives coupled with good support for pupils' learning, enables pupils, throughout the school, including those with special educational needs, to make good progress in improving their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts. In most lessons, pupils work hard and at a good pace. Even though teachers manage pupils very well, in a few lessons the disruptive behaviour of a small minority of pupils has an adverse effect upon progress.

79. Leadership and management in the science department are very good. The head of science is dedicated and has a clear vision of what is needed to improve. She is very well supported by an adequate number of teachers of whom several are either employed on a part-time basis or are new to teaching. Educational direction is clear and focused. As a result, there is evidence of developments, which are likely to lead to further improvements. Development planning, which is in line with school development planning, is effective and manageable. The procedures for assessment are outstanding. Its use to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers, adjust teaching and guide curriculum planning, is excellent. Day-to-day marking is thorough and comments are constructive. Resources, in terms of books and equipment, are good and provide good support for teaching and learning. The number of laboratories in the department is satisfactory. Even though several new laboratories have recently been provided and others refurbished there are still three that require renovation. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Provided that the current good quality of teaching is maintained and further opportunities are provided for gifted and talented pupils, the capacity for further improvement is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average.
- GCSE results are lower than the national average due to lack of curriculum time.
- Improved resources enable individual pupils access to a computer, this has a positive impact on learning.
- Temporary teaching arrangements are having an adverse effect on teaching and learning.
- Very good technician support ensures that equipment is well maintained.

Commentary

80. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were below the national average because GCSE coursework was produced in Years 9 and 10 when there was insufficient lesson time for pupils to comfortably complete the work. The ICT curriculum time in Year 9 has now been increased.
81. Teachers' assessments show that standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above the national average. However in Year 10 pupils find it difficult to apply the GCSE assessment criteria retrospectively to work completed during Year 9, and the level of achievement is not maintained. The current Year 11 do not have a discrete ICT lesson in which to complete their portfolios, although the school plans to provide specific support upon the return of the head of department from sick leave. Year 9 pupils are making good progress in understanding the use of formulae in spreadsheets and simple modelling techniques but achievement this term is below expectations because of the lack of specialist teaching.
82. The overall quality of teaching observed in discrete ICT lessons during the inspection was unsatisfactory. Pupils' work and other inspection evidence indicates that this is not indicative of the usual quality of teaching and learning in ICT. At the time of the inspection the head of department was absent on long-term sick leave. Although the school has been able to appoint part-time temporary teachers to cover this absence, the teachers are not familiar with the software and resources required by the new National ICT strategy or the GCSE assessment criteria. This is having an adverse impact on pupils' learning because learning tasks in too many lessons are not well matched to pupils' attainment levels. As a result, pupils are not fully engaged and are easily distracted. In this circumstance behaviour deteriorates and classroom management becomes difficult.
83. Departmental documentation and other information indicate that the quality of leadership and management of the subject is usually at least satisfactory and possibly better. There are good

procedures for the standardisation of assessment and to ensure the safe use of the Internet. Schemes of work are being updated to ensure the full implementation of the national ICT strategy. The recent investment in up-to-date computers has a positive effect on learning because pupils have individual access to a computer in lessons. Technician support is very good but the team has no separate workshop to carry out maintenance work and this results in some minor disruption to lessons.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

84. Pupils show a satisfactory level of competence in the way in which they use ICT to support their work in other subjects. Good use is made of ICT in science for data logging and in design and technology for computer aided design and manufacture. ICT is used well in English, modern foreign languages and geography, but not enough use is made of computers in music and art. There is at present no co-ordinated cross-curricular strategy to support the application and development of pupils' ICT skills. Pupils make very good use of computers in the library and ICT rooms at lunchtimes to carry out research activities and to enhance the presentation of coursework

HUMANITIES

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well and standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average.
- GCSE examination results are well above average.
- Very good attitudes and behaviour provide a good platform for learning.
- Teaching is good but some lessons do not offer enough challenge.

Commentary

85. Teachers' assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 to be well above the average. This is matched by inspection evidence and represents very good achievement by pupils whose geographical skills and knowledge are about average on entry to the school. The 2003 GCSE results were also well above average and above those obtained in 2002. These results are consistent with inspection evidence and again represent good achievement.
86. In Years 7 to 9 pupils of all abilities display an increasing understanding of geographical skills. They are able to undertake enquiry work, display knowledge of geographical processes and global patterns. This was seen to advantage in a lower attaining Year 9 class who were using ICT effectively to present investigations on volcanoes. Written skills are developed well and extended writing, using good technical vocabulary, is seen in all years. However, there are not enough opportunities for imaginative writing. Numerical skills are applied well through the measurement of line and angle, the use of co-ordinates and the representation of data. This is extended in Years 10 and 11 where pupils are able to use more advanced graphing and statistical methods effectively in their coursework. Coursework shows that pupils are able to hypothesise, gather and interpret data and reach valid judgements.
87. Teaching and learning are good. Well-planned lessons give teachers opportunities to use their good subject knowledge effectively. Although many lessons are very good, some could offer greater challenge and engage pupils in more independent learning activities. Assessment is used very well, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve. The very effective teaching of examination skills makes a significant contribution to the very good GCSE results. Pupils behave very well and display

very positive attitudes to their learning. Good relationships are obvious in all lessons and lead

to good collaborative learning. Reinforcement is generally good but in some lessons there is a need for more incisive questioning.

88. A new head of department leads a small but experienced team in which the management is good. Very good schemes of work provide a solid basis for good learning and although there needs to be more sharing of good practice, the team has the ability to maintain high standards. The department has built steadily on the many strengths identified in the last inspection report.

HISTORY

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and pupils achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Source analysis and evaluation skills require further improvement.
- Classroom relationships are good and pupils behave well.
- Assessment procedures could be improved.
- Not enough time is allocated to the study of 18th and 19th century Britain.

Commentary

89. In 2002, 62 per cent of candidates achieved grades A* to C at GCSE. This is similar to the proportion that did so nationally and rather smaller than it had been in the two preceding years. In 2003, 71 per cent obtained comparable grades with nearly one-third achieving A* and A grades, indicating good achievement. Teachers' assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 to be above average.
90. Inspection evidence shows the standards of pupils' work at the end of Years 9 and 11 to be above national expectations and to reflect good achievement. Pupils complete good quantities of well presented work in technically accurate English. They select information from a range of evidence and organize it into arguments well. At GCSE level there are clear strengths in extended writing and the interpretation of sources, but pupils in all years need more practice in analytical and evaluative skills. Pupils achieve highly because they behave well and respond positively to each other, their teachers and the opportunities offered to them.
91. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan their lessons very thoroughly, ensuring that the materials and tasks selected are adapted for a range of abilities, thereby enabling all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to make good progress. Literacy is well supported because teachers test pupils' understanding of subject specific terminology and make good use of sentence starters and writing frames. In the best lessons, high expectations and challenging exercises develop pupils' independence in learning well. Pupils would benefit from a greater emphasis on the teaching of source evaluation skills, and from enhancing their understanding of what is required to move from one national curriculum level to the next.
92. The newly appointed head of department has already formed an accurate appraisal of the issues, such as assessment procedures, which most require attention, and has made a good start in addressing them. Policies are clear and helpful although schemes of work require updating to reflect planned opportunities for ICT and citizenship. Improvement since the last inspection is good, as the attainment of all pupils in Years 7 to 9 is now above national expectations and the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above expectations in Years 7 to 9 and in the 2003 GCSE short course.
- Teaching is good and contributes well to pupil achievement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Pupils' work is assessed well and provides them with clear information on strengths and weaknesses.
- There is not enough monitoring of teaching to identify and share good practice and tackle weaknesses.

Commentary

93. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above expectations in relation to the Hertfordshire LEA agreed syllabus. Given pupils' broadly average standards on entry to the school, these standards represent good achievement. There are some good examples of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. They are able to link their knowledge of religion with their everyday experiences. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work enable pupils to improve their speaking and listening skills.
94. Standards in Years 10 and 11, were above average in the 2003 GCSE short course. Over 70 per cent of pupils achieved A* to C grades. In the work seen, pupils' achievement is good. Pupils extend their knowledge and understanding of how they can learn from religion and apply it in their lives. They make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts. However, they do not always question or explore their own attitudes in sufficient depth owing to the limited amount of curriculum time available.
95. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The effective use of discussion and questioning enables pupils to express their opinions and form clear judgments about religious and moral issues. The teachers' very good knowledge of the subject enables pupils to make good progress in the GCSE course. In one Year 11 lesson, pupils showed a very clear understanding of the issues involved in abortion and their ability to articulate their views was very well developed. Homework is well used to allow pupils to consolidate the information they have gained in class. Teachers communicate clear expectations to pupils and present them with appropriate challenges. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement. Assessment procedures are used effectively to enable pupils to be clear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. Pupils' spiritual and moral awareness is particularly strong. They demonstrate a clear respect for the views, faiths and traditions of each other.
96. Curriculum leadership is good, with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of the department approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment. She has been very successful in developing a strong team approach, and is very well supported by other teachers, none of whom are specialists. Management is satisfactory but not enough use is made of the monitoring to identify and share good practice and to tackle weaknesses. Since the last inspection standards and the quality of teaching have improved. This has led to good pupil achievement and progress.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The effective use of ICT to improve designing.
- The implementation of the revised schemes of work has strengthened pupils' problem solving and led to improved examination results.
- The Year 7 curriculum does not take enough account of pupils' prior learning.
- Assessment procedures are good, but teachers' assessments are not moderated and this makes the end of Year 9 assessments insecure.
- The accommodation for food and textiles is good but the accommodation for graphics and resistant materials is unsatisfactory and impedes learning.

Commentary

97. Standards are above national expectations at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement when the level of subject knowledge when pupils enter the school is taken into account. GSCE Examination results in 2002 were above national averages and stronger in food, resistant materials and textiles than in graphics. A* and A grades were also above the national average indicating very good achievement. Very good equality of opportunity is illustrated by the high level of entry to GCSE compared with other schools.
98. The department does not carry out base line assessments in Year 7 and this slows progress initially because some pupils repeat work done in the primary schools. Teachers' assessments are not moderated and this makes the end of Year 9 National Curriculum assessments insecure. Food technology is not provided for pupils in Year 9. Very good schemes of work and well structured work books that focus on literacy, numeracy, ICT and independent problem solving within a designing context, strengthen pupils' capability in both designing and making and support good achievement.
99. In Years 10 and 11, pupils produce very good portfolios and show inspired thinking in their experimental work and very good use of ICT. This is most successful in food and textiles where the good accommodation provides a stimulating environment and supports independent learning. This has a positive effect on pupils' progress. However, the accommodation for resistant materials and graphics is too small for the equipment and size of teaching groups, and this restricts learning opportunities as it is difficult for teachers and pupils to move around. Many pupils commented on the negative impact that these spaces have on their motivation and the quality of their work. Nevertheless, teachers and technicians strive hard to make the best of the conditions and ensure that pupils maintain good standards.
100. Good teaching across all years supports good learning, with examples of outstanding teaching in textiles. Teachers have industrial experience and this brings added relevance and strength to demonstrations. They provide very good role models and this enhances pupils' learning. Teachers demand high quality class work and effective use is made of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. Good marking provides pupils with clear feedback on the strengths and weaknesses in their work, but the standard of the work is rarely related to National Curriculum levels.
101. Leadership is very good. It shows empathy and commitment to working to the strengths of the team. The introduction of programmes such as 'Rapid Response' offer a good level of challenge to more able pupils. Management is good. Performance data is used effectively to measure the department's performance. Assessment strategies are progressing well to provide more effective continual feedback to learners. Improvement from the previous inspection has been good. The accommodation in resistant materials and graphics however remains an issue.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are above the national average.
- Drawing and painting skills are firmly established in Years 7 to 9.
- The department planning for schemes of work, lessons and assessment is excellent.
- The accommodation and display areas are very good.
- There is a need to extend the range of teaching and learning strategies.
- Not enough use is made of ICT and there is a need for a wider range of craft activities.

Commentary

102. The 2003 teacher assessments show attainment at the end of Year 9 to be above average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the 2003 GCSE examination was significantly above average. These results represent good achievement and maintain the examination profile of recent years.
103. Inspection evidence is consistent with teachers' assessments. Because pupils follow a well-planned and structured programme in Years 7 to 9, which builds effectively on their prior attainment, they achieve well and standards are above national expectations. Skill acquisition in painting and drawing techniques is good and pupils confidently use artistic vocabulary. Pupils' attitudes to learning in most lessons are very positive. Everyone has a sketch book which they keep with pride and the written entries, which are virtually without spelling errors are neatly presented.
104. The standards of pupils' work presently in Years 10 and 11 are broadly in line with expectations. This is partly because of the time in the year at which the inspection took place but also because some of the teaching strategies do not offer enough challenge to the more gifted and talented pupils. The standards of literacy in the sketchbooks is very good, demonstrating competent spelling, an eye for layout and an understanding of the facts gleaned from book and website investigations. The exploration of ideas is enthusiastic but in some cases fall short of excellence because of an over reliance on secondary sources.
105. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, although slightly better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. This difference is explained by the teachers' use of a wider range of teaching strategies and more varied learning activities in the lower years. Four well-qualified teachers, who are passionate in their enthusiasm for the subject, use their knowledge and expertise to good effect. In the best lessons, pupils have a clear understanding of the learning objectives and because learning tasks are carefully planned they are fully engaged and very productive. However, in a few lessons in Years 10 and 11, the learning activities do not fully involve all pupils and this leads to inattentiveness and a loss of concentration. Clear assessment objectives, available in all the girls' work books, and in Year 10, based on expected levels of attainment for National Curriculum art and design, lend rigour to the courses.
106. The leadership in art and design is good and teachers work well as a team. Behaviour expectations are high and the girls are encouraged to be very thoughtful in their movement around the rooms and in their use of tools. Staff teaching in two subject areas gives the department another textile dimension and this is a particularly exciting element in the displays outside the art rooms. There is a strong skill resource in the department and time to exchange ideas and look at areas for improvement would be well spent. The geographical area is well

served with cultural sources but limited use is made of these to enhance teaching and the department is not exploiting the full potential of its links with the wider community. Since the last inspection the department has continued to maintain good standards. ICT applications have moved on in this time and the department has not kept pace with the potential curriculum enhancement that ICT could offer.

Drama

107. A small sample of drama lessons was seen during the inspection.
108. Drama is a popular subject that provides opportunities for examination work to substantial numbers of pupils in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results are above the national average; there is regularly a full pass rate at grades A* to G, and in 2002 and 2003 high proportions of pupils achieved the highest A* or B grades. Work seen in Year 11 indicates similar standards.
109. Teaching is at least satisfactory, with some very strong features, particularly in Year 11. The courses are carefully planned and lessons follow a clear structure. There was very good teacher and peer group assessment of work in all lessons seen. Pupils greatly enjoy the subject and most of them work well.
110. The department is part of the expressive arts faculty. It makes a good contribution to the life of the school outside lessons, with a programme of theatre visits for examination classes and thriving drama clubs, one for Year 7, run by the sixth form, and one for Years 8 to 11, run by teachers. There are regular whole school productions and many opportunities for examination groups to present their work in public performances.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The growth in numbers of pupils taking instrumental lessons helps to cater for the needs of the more musically able pupils.
- The complementary strengths of the music staff enable pupils to participate in worthwhile musical experiences.
- There is a need to formalise assessments so that pupils' learning can be more thoroughly monitored and appropriate targets set.
- Coverage of the National Curriculum is restricted because not enough use is made of ICT. This also has an adverse impact on pupil recruitment to the GCSE course.
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils help to promote good learning.

Commentary

111. Teachers' assessments show that by the end of Year 9 in the summer of 2003, the attainment of the large majority of pupils was well above average at Level 5 and above. The proportion of pupils attaining A* to C grades in the GCSE examination was also above average and an improvement on the results obtained in 2002 when the proportion of pupils attaining these grades was below average.
112. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. As standards on entry in Year 7 are variable, the standards at the end of Year 9 represent good achievement. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to work with ICT and this is having an adverse impact on the achievement of many of the musically less able pupils in all years. Standards in Year 10 are in line with expectations and achievement is

good. There are no lessons in the current Year 11 owing to an initial shortage of pupils last year.

113. Teaching and learning is satisfactory in Year 7 and good in other years. In Year 7, a lack of pace and too much teacher direction delays music making. All teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and complement each other in their diversity of strengths. Good relationships with the pupils were observed in all classes. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and resourced to cater for pupils of all musical abilities. As a result, pupils with special needs very often make good progress. Provision in lessons for the more musically able pupils is not demanding enough. Further opportunities for the more musically able are offered in the form of instrumental tuition provided by Hertfordshire music service.
114. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Since the last inspection a part-time teacher has been appointed head of department. Standards have risen and the numbers of pupils involved in instrumental lessons have increased. The department is making a good contribution to pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The accommodation is satisfactory. Whilst the main classroom is versatile and well laid out there are not enough practice rooms for group work and inadequate storage. There are not enough computers to enable ICT to become an integral part of the Year 7 to 9 curriculum. There is also a need to formalise the assessment procedures.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils reach above average standards and achieve well in relation to their starting points on entry to the school.
- GCSE examination results are above average and are improving.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils behave well and have very positive attitudes to learning.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities is provided and participation rates are very good.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- The nature and availability of indoor accommodation for physical education restrict the range of activities which can be provided.
- In the concluding part of some lessons, pupils are not given enough opportunity to reflect on how well they have learned.

Commentary

115. GCSE results in 2002 were above average and pupils achieved well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of Year 10. Results in 2003 improved on these and the school's analysis indicates that achievement was again good.
116. Standards seen in Year 9 are above national expectations. Pupils have a well-developed capacity to plan and evaluate their work. They achieve well in relation to their average starting points in Year 7 because they have very positive attitudes to learning and are well taught. Standards seen in compulsory physical education lessons in Year 11 are above expectations. In some optional activities they are in line with expectations. Nevertheless, this still represents good achievement because in many of these activities, for example trampolining, progress has been rapid because pupils have little previous experience. A major reason for good achievement in Years 10 and 11 is the way pupils respond to the opportunities provided to work independently. In examination classes, standards are well above expectations. Standards in dance, which is being examined for the first time, are in line with expectations and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. A significant proportion of pupils take part in the very good

programme of extra-curricular sporting activities, which makes a good contribution to the standards reached in physical education.

117. The quality of teaching and learning is good and in physical education examination lessons it is often very good. Expectations in both compulsory and optional examination lessons are high. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils, which they capitalise on by giving them considerable responsibility for their own learning. Marking of theoretical work is very good with regular effective monitoring of progress towards agreed targets. Computers and audio-visual equipment is used well to support learning. In some lessons, not enough is done to encourage pupils to assess how well, in addition to what, they have learned.
118. Leadership and management are very good. A clear vision for subject development is translated into effective action within an ethos which also ensures that physical education makes a very positive contribution to all aspects of pupils' personal development. Issues raised at the time of the previous inspection have been resolved well and both examination results and the quality of teaching and learning have improved. However, the limited nature of the indoor accommodation for teaching physical education restricts the range of activities, which can be taught. The gymnasium is used on an increasing number of occasions throughout the year to accommodate examinations, which also restricts learning opportunities in the subject.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The vision and passion of the team leader has led to the devising and teaching of an excellent programme of study.
- The commitment and dedication of the teaching team ensures consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Some departments have yet to incorporate fully elements of the programme of study into their own schemes of work.
- Very effective assessment procedures support pupil's' progress and achievement.

Commentary

119. Teachers' assessments show that by the end of Year 9 in the summer of 2003, the attainment of all pupils was in line with expectations, the majority being well above. The school's assessment procedures are accurate and have been verified by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment (QCA) agency. As the pupils do not start citizenship until Year 7 their attainment represents very good achievement.
120. Teaching and learning are excellent in all year groups. A committed team of teachers probe the pupils' recall of previous lessons to thoroughly prepare them for the forthcoming lesson. They continually challenge and involve all pupils and enable them to take an active part in the lessons thereby helping them to build up a good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well prepared and resourced with a wide range of activities to illustrate the concepts being learnt. Consequently, pupils of all abilities participate whole-heartedly and thus enjoy and absorb the valuable learning taking place. The learning environment in each lesson is conducive to building the pupils' confidence so that they volunteer to debate and ask questions on what might otherwise be sensitive matters.
121. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The subject is purposefully led and managed by a dedicated teacher who has been the inspiration of the whole programme. She has seamlessly fused the original PSHE curriculum with those of careers education and

citizenship to produce a series of complementary and inter-related units, which very successfully contribute to the development of the pupils in the school. She is supported by a small team of teachers who strive to provide interesting lessons and relevant activities for the pupils in the different year groups. The verification of the assessment procedures by QCA is a further indication of the quality of the curriculum, the intense involvement of the whole team, and their belief in the validity of the subject and its benefit to the young people in the school.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	1	100	90	100	43	120	39.0
Biology	6	83	82	0	33	43	33.2
Communication Studies	5	80	94	60	36	38.0	38.5
English Literature	3	100	94	33	38	73	38.9
German	5	60	88	0	35	32	35.6
History	4	100	92	50	37	90	37.8
Other Sciences	12	75	83	8	32	24.2	33.4

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	7	100	96	57	49	97	85.1
Biology	14	93	92	36	36	73	74.1
Business	9	100	87	33	17	89	60.1
Communication Studies	7	100	98	57	37	85.7	81.1
Drama	8	100	98	63	42	98	82.9
English Literature	16	94	99	50	44	84	84.3
Geography	5	100	97	20	41	84.0	80.9
Mathematics	6	100	93	83	52	93	84.7
Other Sciences	11	100	95	27	40	69.1	78.7

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English Literature and German, but French was also sampled. Results at A-level are above average. Good teaching helps students to make good progress.

English literature

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCE Advanced level examinations have improved significantly since the previous inspection and were particularly good in 2003.
- Very good teaching and learning and assessment procedures result in very good achievement.
- Students work hard and respond very well to the challenge offered to them in lessons.
- The subject is very well led and managed. Many of the sixth form teachers are new this term but there is already very good consistency of approach in the classroom.

Commentary

122. Standards at A-level were above average in 2002 and improved significantly in 2003 when all students obtained at least Grade C and 76 per cent gained Grades A and B. This represents very good achievement when compared with students' attainment on entry to the school and GCSE results.
123. These standards were reflected in work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in students' written work. This is largely because teachers are prepared to step back and allow students to develop and test their own thoughts and opinions. Students very much appreciate and enjoy this encouragement to be independent and they respond well. Their standards of literacy are very good; Year 13 students write fluently and with good insight. They demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of texts, use technical language and a wide vocabulary with confidence and are willing to explore their ideas in open discussion. They recognise that texts can be interpreted in different ways and are not afraid to disagree with each other and present their own point of view with vigour and good evidence. In Year 12, students have made a good start to the AS level course. In one Year 12 lesson, their first on Chaucer, students, including several from minority ethnic backgrounds and one whose home language is not English, made very good progress in interpreting the original text and in identifying differences in spelling and syntax and the impact of historical and social context.
124. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. All lessons are underpinned by a determination on the part of teachers that students should be independent and critical readers. Students are often required to lead discussions and present arguments to the class. On the other hand, teachers are always ready to challenge students with probing questions and to offer support with their own excellent knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject. Students are helped to improve their work through very helpful marking which identifies when and where students are meeting assessment objectives. This is so effectively used that students themselves often refer to these objectives in discussions.
125. The very good leadership and management is a major factor in promoting high standards. The head of faculty leads by example through her own very good skills in the classroom and although several sixth form teachers are new this term there is already a common approach to teaching. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection especially in the proportion gaining the higher grades of A and B in A-level examinations which has risen from 26 per cent in 1997 to 76 per cent in 2003.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

126. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are generally very good and are further promoted through the key skills courses. Students enter the sixth form with good standards of literacy and the school takes seriously its responsibility to develop higher order skills of analysis, criticism and synthesis. The Year 12 key skills (communications) lesson seen was effective in enabling students to sharpen their skill in identifying and tracking the main argument in a range of complex texts.

German

Provision in German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve above average grades at A-level.
- Most students make very good progress from GCSE.
- Very good teaching entuses students and helps them to organise their work effectively.
- Very good leadership and management underpin effective programmes of study.
- Students work hard. They have very good attitudes and respond well to demands to work independently.
- Very good assessment procedures give students an awareness of progress and guidance on how to improve.

Commentary

127. Standards at A-level are above average. In 2003 almost three quarters of candidates gained grades A to C, with almost half gaining grade A. This represents very good progress from GCSE and AS level. Results at AS level in 2003 were below the average for 2002. Those who continued into the current Year 13 gained good or very good grades. However, more than half of the original cohort did not make enough progress from GCSE, for a wide range of reasons, and have not continued.
128. Standards in lessons and work seen in Year 13 are above expectations. Students benefit from the exclusive use of German in lessons, so that their listening and speaking skills are very well developed. They understand complex language, and most use a wide range of vocabulary and structures when answering questions or exchanging information with classmates. Written work confirms well-developed reading and writing skills. Students write at reasonable length, accurately and with increasingly sophisticated language to balance arguments on challenging topics, such as the distribution of wealth, crime and punishment and healthy living. This work contributes significantly to their moral, social and cultural development. In Year 12, students have made a good start to the AS level course. The early emphasis is on consolidating and expanding knowledge of verb tenses and structures. In oral work, they make good progress in applying this knowledge, and are rapidly gaining the confidence to participate freely in structured situations.
129. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers plan work effectively to deliver well-organised programmes of study. Activities involve all students. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject rubs off on students who are, in turn, keen learners. They use dedicated study time well to develop independent learning skills, especially by researching topics via the Internet. This improves their reading skills and informs oral and written work well, so that each student brings a personal slant to the work of the group. This happens because teachers provide clear direction and a sense of purpose. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, both of the language and of the factual content in prescribed topics. They make lessons more interesting and relevant by the use of very good authentic resources. Teachers are adept at

identifying individual errors to improve the learning of the whole group. Homework is used particularly well to reinforce learning. Relationships are very strong, so that there is a shared enjoyment in learning.

130. Leadership and management are very effective in promoting high standards. Apart from the very good schemes of work, assessment procedures, including constructive marking, are very effective in supporting progress, with a good level of individual review and target setting. Students benefit from the provision of an excellent course guide, which sets out teachers' expectations of them, as well as course content and assessment criteria. Students are encouraged to take responsibility. They run a language club for younger pupils, and Year 13 students are currently arranging a week in Cologne for themselves. This reflects the vibrant and successful learning environment created by the staff. Unsurprisingly, results have improved since the previous inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Achievement is good.
- Teaching is rigorous which leads to very good learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- Approaches to learning are often too restricted.

Commentary

131. Results at GCE A-level were above average in 2002 and these standards have been maintained in 2003 with every student achieving at least a pass grade. The number of students achieving Grades A and B is well above the national average. Students studying for the AS qualifications achieved results in 2003 that were very high and students do better in mathematics than in other subjects. Retention rates are good with almost every student continuing with their studies in mathematics into Year 13.
132. Standards seen during the inspection were above average and all students are achieving very well. Students take a real pride in their work and organise their notes methodically. Students in Year 12 build on their GCSE results and are coping well with the demands of the AS course. Students confidently use different techniques to determine the roots of a range of functions. At this stage in Year 12 their understanding of the principles of differentiation and its application is very good. Year 13 students confidently progress with their studies and use computers and graphical calculators to consolidate their understanding of polynomials. Students quickly grasp the method for expanding binomial expressions because their algebraic competence is very strong.
133. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and leads to students' good achievement. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and the requirements of the various courses are very good. Teaching is rigorous with careful attention paid to the teaching of methods and principles needed to approach standard problems. As a result students are able to progress and develop their mathematical knowledge and understanding systematically. Teachers' expectations of students are very high. Attitudes to learning are very good; students concentrate intently in lessons and show a high level of interest, contributing significantly to the learning that takes place. Students have a good knowledge of their own performance. Marking of students' work is regular and thorough, providing helpful comments on how to improve.

134. Leadership and management of mathematics are very good. Teachers are enthusiastic and work very effectively as a team. They are very knowledgeable about the demands of the courses. Teachers openly share ideas and resources. The analysis of examination results is excellent and provides valuable information on individual student performance. Progress since the last inspection is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

135. Students' mathematical knowledge and skills are sufficient for the needs of their chosen courses. All students in Year 12 undertake the study of application of mathematics – key skills at Level 3 and are successful. Students are able to improve their grade at GCSE with support and guidance from teachers. The school's mathematics across the curriculum policy provides very useful guidance on specific aspects, for example the handling of data and interpreting statistics in geography and history.

SCIENCE

The focus was on biology. Both chemistry and physics were sampled. The numbers of students entered were too small for statistically valid comparisons to be made with national figures. In the lessons observed, teaching and learning were at least satisfactory and in some lessons good and very good.

Biology

Provision for biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and leads to very good achievement.
- Assessment is used very well to follow the progress of students and to guide teaching and learning.
- There are no significant areas of weakness.

Commentary

136. The GCE A-level examination results in 2002 were well above those of all other schools nationally. A-level results were much better than those achieved in 2001. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade. The proportion gaining higher grades, A and B, was well above average. In relation to their GCSE results, students' achievement was very good. AS-level results in 2002 were above average and achievement was good. All students gained a pass grade. Although results at AS-level and A-level, in the 2003 examinations, were below those for 2002, they represent similar achievement.
137. Whilst present standards are, as a whole, as expected, many are attaining standards that are well above expectations. Year 13 students are achieving at least as expected in relation to their GCSE results with the achievement of some higher-attaining students being better than expected. Students make very good progress as a result of very good teaching. In a very good biology lesson, for example, students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the role of coloured pigments in photosynthesis. Higher-attaining students in particular recall previous knowledge very well and use it effectively to develop further understanding. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom.
138. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but most are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of biology. Written work is well developed and students make good progress in developing their skills of independent research. Lower-attaining students, however, in particular those who studied science to foundation level at GCSE, have greater

difficulty in coping with the demands of advanced work. Nevertheless, as a result of very good teaching, all are making good progress and the achievement of all students is as expected in comparison with prior attainment

139. Teaching is very good. The principal features of teaching are the use of very good subject knowledge by teachers, good well-focused planning and a range of methods, which maintain interest and engender learning. Homework is set which extends class-work and often takes the form of structured questions. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough and usually provides valuable information for students on how to improve their performance.
140. Students' learning is very good. They respond very well to challenge, work hard and show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. Most undertake independent work maturely, can extract information and make their own notes on, for example, osmosis. Lower-attaining students are less confident. They have greater difficulty in independent research and rely more on their teachers for information.
141. Leadership and management in the biology department are both very good. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Assessment procedures are excellent and used very well to track the progress of students and to guide teaching and learning. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

There are no sixth form courses in ICT.

HUMANITIES

The main focus of the inspection was on history and religious education. Courses in law, sociology and psychology taught at Oaklands College were sampled. Good teaching in law, very good teaching in psychology and outstanding teaching in sociology ensure that students learn very well, extend their knowledge and understanding and achieve very good results. A Year 13 government and politics lesson was sampled. The lesson was very thoroughly planned and students learned well because of clear exemplification by the teacher. Only small numbers opt for the subject and they usually achieve highly at A-level.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students become effective independent learners and achieve well in both years.
- Students are well supported by good teaching.
- The analysis and evaluation of sources is not given enough emphasis.
- Classroom relationships are very strong.
- The small A-level group limits the range of teaching strategies.

Commentary

142. Over recent years all candidates have obtained pass grades at A-level although numbers opting for the subject have been very small so national comparisons are insecure. In 2003 all seven candidates were successful, but only two gained A or B grades, a slightly smaller proportion than do so nationally.

143. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, students make good progress and achieve well in reaching standards consistent with expectations. Students compile detailed, extended notes in largely accurate written English, although lower-attaining students' work contains some misspelling of basic words such as revolution. They offer well-constructed arguments in full and detailed essays, which explore issues well, although their source analysis and evaluation skills warrant further development. Students discuss their work knowledgeably, although the small size of the A-level group restricts the extent to which this is feasible. They use computers very proficiently for research and communication.
144. Students are uniformly positive in their approach to the subject and they respond very well to the opportunities open to them. In Year 12 they are opting for the subject in increasing numbers. They value the support offered by their teachers and library staff, and classroom relationships are very good.
145. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare their lessons very thoroughly, paying careful attention to encouraging students to become independent learners. They have high expectations and set challenging tasks such as inviting students to assess the extent to which the Cold War was 'driven by personality'. Only occasionally do teachers fail to correct errors in students' work or tend towards didacticism in lessons, although not enough emphasis is given to the need to include sufficient reference to chronology in their work.
146. The newly appointed head of department has already formed an accurate appraisal of the priorities for development and has made a good start in addressing them. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Religious studies

Provision in religious studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good. It contributes well to students' achievement and enables students to learn independently.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
- Not enough use is made of the use of detailed targets against which pupil progress can be identified.

Commentary

147. In the 2002 A-level examinations only two students were entered. Both gained pass grades and one achieved Grade B. Standards in the current AS level course in Year 12 are as expected. Students demonstrate a good understanding of philosophical and religious concepts. Students demonstrated their ability to produce well-structured and balanced arguments. In lessons and work seen in Year 12, teachers challenge students to analyse material and form judgements about a range of philosophical and ethical issues. The teacher's good use of discussion and high expectations, contributed very well to students' ability to think independently.
148. Standards in Year 13 are also as expected. Students demonstrate their ability to use ethical language. Through the teacher's challenging and enabling approach, students use their skills of analysis to draw out ideas and to make distinctions between opinions, beliefs and facts. Discussion enables students to deepen their learning and respect the views of others
149. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have high expectations of students and, as a consequence, students have equally high expectations of themselves. Students use their skills in information and communications technology for research purposes. Greater availability of ICT facilities would enable students to develop this facility and raise standards even further.

Students develop their ability to investigate and interpret and this allows them to move quickly into the key skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis. They achieve well and make good progress. Assessment of students' work is generally sound and very helpful comments are made on their work. The procedures provide a satisfactory basis for assessing what students know and understand. The subject does not set targets that are related to levels of attainment. Consequently, students are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve.

150. There are opportunities for all sixth form students to study some aspects of religion in the life skills programme. Although the school does provide a minimal entitlement, not enough time is given to this important aspect of student development.
151. Good leadership and management of the subject ensure that students are provided with a rich diet. There were no examination courses at the time of the last inspection. However, since that time the number of students now taking religious studies at AS and A-level has increased. The subject makes a substantial contribution to the personal, spiritual and moral development of students. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The course in design and technology (textiles) was sampled. Students were motivated by very good teaching that effectively uses practical examples from business and industry as a context for learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design, and drama and theatre studies. Music was also sampled. In music, students are joined by others from surrounding schools in a consortium arrangement. Standards in Years 12 to 13 are average or above. Teaching is very good and enables students to develop skills that will prove invaluable in their future studies. Courses in media studies are available at Oaklands College but there were no opportunities to observe lessons during the inspection. Of the six students entered for the A-level examination in 2003 all passed and four obtained Grades A or B.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are above the national average. Results in 2003 show an impressive improvement on 2002.
- The department's understanding of the assessment objectives is excellent and effectively applied to all activities.
- Plenty of taught time and small groups ensure very personal attention.
- The combination of art with creative textiles is very successful.
- Not enough use is made of ICT and the range of craft activities is limited.

Commentary

152. All students entering AS examinations in 2003 achieved an A or B grade which was significantly above the national average and a marked improvement on recent years. A-level results were also above the national average and significantly better than the previous year.

153. Standards are above average. Some students start the course with relatively low GCSE grades but they are all enthusiastic and make good progress. The students' attitude to learning is very positive because they are offered a well planned and structured programme, which builds on assessment criteria and thorough skills training lower down the school. The workbooks show thorough enquiry and experimentation with really thoughtful development of their own work. The issues tackled by Year 13 students are searching and socially challenging like "The Shallowness of Fame". They are able to discuss their work fluently and contribute in a very mature way to discussion of each other's work.
154. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The allocation of taught time is generous and group sizes are conducive to individualised learning. The students are encouraged to work in a variety of styles and sizes starting from common projects at the start of Year 12 and progressing to the pursuit of individual styles and enthusiasms by the end of the course. There is a variety of media available, with knowledgeable advice from several staff who teach different aspects of the course. Textiles are used particularly creatively and effectively.
155. The leadership in art and design is good and the teachers work well as a team and have complimentary skills. The geographical area is well served with cultural sources but limited use is made of these by the school to enhance the students learning although the students individually are very enthusiastic about visiting galleries. They make full use of photographic and ICT facilities available at home. These are very independent, capable students who could contribute to and make more use of links with the wider community. Since the last inspection the department has continued to maintain above average standards.

Drama and theatre studies

The provision in drama and theatre studies is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high because of the challenging teaching.
- Students are exceptionally committed. They, like their teachers, constantly strive to extend their skills and attain the very highest standards.
- The secure and supportive atmosphere in lessons encourages students to take risks, experiment, offer and accept constructive criticism and learn from it.
- There are very good opportunities for enrichment through visits to high quality theatre and through contact with professionals.
- Drama makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development and to the development of the key skills of communication, problem solving and working together.

Commentary

156. Results in the 2002 A-level examinations were well above average and improved even further in 2003 when all nine students gained at least Grade C and seven achieved Grades A or B. This represents very good achievement given students' attainment on entry to the school and their GCSE results.
157. During the inspection standards seen were above average. The reason that they were not quite as high as in external examinations is because in both Year 12 and Year 13 the work in progress was experimental and at an early stage. Nevertheless, students are reaching high standards because of challenging teaching and their own application and commitment. Students have good devising and performance skills, responding to each other with sensitivity. This is well illustrated in the way that Year 12 students have welcomed one boy from another school into their group. They know their texts well, can discuss their meaning and show a very good understanding of the processes involved in transferring text to performance.

158. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Lessons offer rich learning opportunities to students. The two teachers are skilled practitioners and excellent role models for students. They encourage students to take responsibility, to have as much impact on the direction of the lesson as their teachers, to explore their own feelings and to empathise with others through the drama. Excellent use of assessment with students identifying what works well and how performance can be further improved is a significant factor in the excellent progress in lessons.

EXAMPLES OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent teaching in drama and theatre studies.

A strong feature of the excellent teaching seen in drama was the way in which theory and practice were intertwined. In one Year 12 lesson taught by a professional singer, now a graduate trainee, students made excellent gains in their understanding of how they could control their breathing through a series of well devised exercises. They could feel their bodies responding and used this newly gained control to excellent effect in their next lesson when their other teacher noted a dramatic improvement in their voice skills. In a Year 13 lesson rehearsing a scene from 'Our Country's Good' the teacher used earlier learning about the theories of Brecht and Stanislavski to enable students to explore the relationship between soldier and convict in Australia. The subtleties they discovered in the text and the depth of their understanding of the characters' motivation were impressive. Similar rapid progress was demonstrated in a Year 12 lesson when the teacher led students through a series of status exercises to enrich and deepen their understanding of the power struggle in the Greek play 'Antigone'.

159. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The head of department has established very strong links with theatres and colleges, which both enrich the curriculum and provide opportunities for teachers to keep abreast of new developments. The teachers also take seriously their responsibility to contribute to the development of their students as fully rounded individuals. As a consequence students learn how to work with others to solve problems and they become people who will be better able to deal with their lives and more sensitive to others as a result. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection and with two specialists in the department is well poised to maintain the high standards.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

There was no opportunity to observe lessons in physical education at Oaklands College during the inspection. Results in A-level in 2003 were very good with 80 per cent of students gaining Grade A or B.

BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards for both AS and A level are consistently above average.
- Students achieve well because of the good teaching.
- Student attitudes to work are good and this aids independent and collaborative learning.
- There is very good access to ICT for research to widen knowledge.
- Business links are not as strong as they should be for this vocational course.

Commentary

160. Results in advanced vocational business were as predicted although the number of advanced students was small. The AS course is a popular option, and in 2003 more than half the students attained grade A or B and others gained at least a grade D, in line with or above the school's predicted grades.
161. In Year 12 achievement is satisfactory. For most students this is a new subject and they are gaining an understanding of the foundations of business and the participative nature of the course. Access to ICT is very good and students carry out independent research into international companies using the World Wide Web to ensure up-to-date information. This helps analysis of the effects of foreign competition upon company practice. In Year 13 achievement is good and in lessons students show good understanding of the purposes and effects of sponsorship deals and press releases on different companies. Students use the assessment criteria well to include all pertinent points in their coursework, which is well presented and meets the high expectations of their teacher.
162. Teaching and learning are good and students benefit from their teacher's very good knowledge and effective use of real world exemplars to aid their understanding. The long four-period teaching session is well planned to maintain a good pace, and includes a range of activities that provide challenge to students who are actively engaged in the learning process. All students have positive attitudes to their work and well-established relationships with colleagues and the teacher are used effectively in individual and pair work for sharing ideas and consolidating knowledge. Independent learning is encouraged and progress is monitored and supported well by the teacher. Coursework is assessed regularly, there is written feedback and work is discussed with each student. As a result students continue to improve the quality of their work.
163. The experienced part-time teacher manages his day-to-day work well and is firmly committed to the success of the subject. The use of business links has declined due to staffing changes, and although some students take the opportunity for work experience during school holidays, there are insufficient planned opportunities to learn about business from a first hand perspective. Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

164. Key skills are taught in Year 12. One lesson in each key skill programme was seen. Teaching and learning in communication and the application of number was good and in ICT it was very good. The students in the communications lesson were completing an exercise to improve the skills of analysis and synthesis and recognised that they are skills that are useful across all subjects. In the application of number lesson a well chosen task engaged students in increasing their knowledge and understanding of mathematical approaches to problems and issues in a work related context. In the ICT lesson students were reviewing and developing their skills on PowerPoint. All three lessons gave good opportunities for independent learning.
165. The school offers a life skills programme for all sixth formers but it was not possible to observe lessons. To compensate, several students from Years 12 and 13 were interviewed for their views on the course. On the whole, the Year 13 students are more positive about the course than are the Year 12 students. Students who have experienced a year already praise the parenting unit of study. They feel that through this they have become much more aware of and sensitive to the needs of younger pupils. One student said that the course 'teaches you how to understand others, particularly their emotional state'. They also recognise the usefulness of the pre-driving scheme and the session with the local Member of Parliament.

166. All the students agreed that they now have a major influence on how the course is taught. Recent changes mean that they are given the aims of the lesson and asked at the end whether those aims have been met. This means, for instance, that they understood why they were asked in one lesson to 'sell an orange' and recognised that the exercise was designed to develop their creativity and ingenuity and the skills of working together to solve problems.

PART D: SUMMARY OF MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	2	2
How inclusive the school is		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
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	2	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	3	5
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well pupils learn	2	3
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	3	3
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).