

ERRATUM SLIP

Wootton Bassett School

Unique Reference Number: 126455
Contract Number: 259189
Date of inspection: 22/03/2004
Reporting inspector: Robert Drew

INSPECTION REPORT - the following paragraph in Part A should read as follows:-

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher, ably supported by senior colleagues, provides good leadership and management with several very good features and some areas to improve. Within a short period of time in office, he has successfully overseen the reversal of a decline in standards dating from before his arrival, significant curricular improvements, beneficial appointments, better programmes of staff training, including initial teacher training, a wider range of teaching and learning styles and the acquisition of Technology College status. The senior management team, led by the headteacher, have not managed to establish satisfactory science provision, effective procedures to help staff deal consistently well with behavioural problems, or communication systems which convince some parents, staff and pupils that their views are adequately heard. Middle management is generally effective, and in some cases, notably art and geography, outstanding but is unsatisfactory in science. Governors are effective. They know their school well, give sound advice and fulfil most of their statutory duties. However, requirements for religious education in Years 12 to 13 and for the daily act of worship are not met.

INSPECTION REPORT

WOOTTON BASSETT SCHOOL

Wootton Bassett, Swindon

LEA area: Wiltshire

Unique reference number: 126455

Headteacher: Mr C Montacute

Lead inspector: R C Drew

Dates of inspection: 22 – 26 March 2004

Inspection number: 259189

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:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1512
School address:	Lime Kiln Wootton Bassett Swindon Wiltshire
Postcode:	SN4 7HD
Telephone number:	01793 841900
Fax number:	01793 841969
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Malcolm Wilford
Date of previous inspection:	September 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a larger than average school with 1512 pupils on roll, including 207 sixth form students. It is the only secondary school serving Wootton Bassett, just south of Swindon, and also attracts pupils from the surrounding area including many from a nearby RAF station. The intake is neither especially advantaged nor disadvantaged: while the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low, pupils represent a wide mix of social and economic backgrounds and mobility is high. The vast majority of pupils are of white (British) heritage with about 4 per cent of pupils comprising small numbers from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds. Fewer than 2 per cent of pupils use English as an additional language, with only 2 of these at an early stage of language acquisition. Prior attainment is above average and the proportion of pupils on the register of special educational needs (SEN) or with SEN statements is about half the national level. The school has recently acquired entirely new premises and been awarded specialist technology college status

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7281	Robert Drew	Lead inspector	
2545	Elizabeth Burgess	Lay inspector	
18477	Ronald Cohen	Team inspector	History Business education Economics
19586	Wendy Easterby	Team inspector	English
11975	Thelma MacIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music
16950	Caroline Orr	Team inspector	French German English as an additional language
10564	John Tomlinson	Team inspector	Religious education Geography
19015	Gordon Peacock	Team inspector	
30899	Kenneth Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Science
31680	Phil Redican	Team inspector	Art Special educational needs
31100	Geoffrey Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good and effective school with some particularly successful features and some areas to improve. It enables pupils to make good progress and reach above-average standards, made possible by good leadership and management, good teaching and learning and effective use of funds. Value for money is good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils' achievement or 'value added' is good in the main school and in the sixth form.
- Results in Year 9 tests and at GCSE and A level have risen in the last three years.
- The headteacher and senior colleagues have been very successful at reversing a decline in standards, improving the curriculum and helping the school achieve specialist status.
- Overall provision is strong in several subjects and especially effective in art and geography.
- Provision in science has been unsatisfactory for too long.
- Teaching and learning in the main school are good overall, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils are offered a good and improving curriculum with a very good enrichment programme.
- A minority of pupils behave badly and the systems for dealing with this are unsatisfactory.
- Staffing instability in mathematics is having a bad short-term impact on teaching and learning.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, while good for the school as a whole.
- Special educational needs support, while satisfactory by national standards, is less effective than most other areas of the school's work.

The effectiveness of the school has improved well in the last three years and satisfactorily since the previous inspection of 1999. There was a marked decline in results between 1999 and 2001, but the last three years have seen a rising trend in most subjects and other valuable improvements. The key issues of 1999 have generally been dealt with well. Also, the school has acquired new, purpose-built premises that greatly improve provision and has been granted specialist school status.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Overall achievement is good. Pupils have above-average attainment on entry and build securely on this. Their results are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 13. In tests in core subjects (English, mathematics and science) at the end of Year 9, results are well above the national average for all schools and match those for similar schools. Results in English were lower than those in similar schools in 2003, were average in science and above average in mathematics. Standards seen during the inspection in all three subjects are the average for all schools, representing satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9. Achievement and standards in the non-core subjects are generally better, with good 'added-value' in the majority and very good in art and geography. Results in Year 11 are well above the average for all schools and above average for similar schools. 2003 results show lower attainers doing especially well. Work seen shows that standards are above average in most subjects, well above in music and religious studies and very high in art, indicating good achievement in Years 10 and 11 and good overall gains from Year 7 to 11. Current standards are only satisfactory in history and core physical education. Achievement is satisfactory in mathematics and core physical education, and unsatisfactory in science. Girls reach higher standards than boys by more than the national margin in Years 10 and 11. Gifted and talented pupils progress well; those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Results have been rising slowly since 2001 and standards seen suggest that this upward trend is continuing.

Achievement is well above average in mathematics, geography, design and technology and sports studies and especially high in art.

Pupils' personal qualities are soundly developed; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. **Attendance** is very good and the great majority of pupils display good, often very positive attitudes. Many behave with great maturity, but a significant minority can be uncooperative and spoil lessons. **Overall, therefore, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory.**

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The **quality of education provided by the school is good**, because teaching and learning and the curriculum are good with some very good features. **Teaching's** main strengths include the high level of expertise among most staff and their willingness to use an increasing range of teaching strategies. These and other factors such as high-quality leadership make teaching consistently very good in geography and religious education and excellent in art. Learning is best where teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour. In Years 10 and 11, the use of assessment is good and teaching groups are well motivated. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning and the use of assessment are satisfactory by national standards, but in a minority of lessons teaching is unsatisfactory because structure, pace and management of pupils lack rigour.

The school offers a **good and improving curriculum**. The formal curriculum meets all statutory requirements, enhanced by imaginative elements such as work-related learning and the 'Curriculum Plus' programme. **Care, guidance and support are good**, partnership with parents is satisfactory and, with the wider community, good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher, ably supported by senior colleagues, provides good leadership and management with several very good features and some areas to improve. Within a short period of time in office, he has successfully overseen the reversal of a decline in standards dating from before his arrival, significant curricular improvements, beneficial appointments, better programmes of staff training, including initial teacher training, a wider range of teaching and learning styles and the acquisition of Technology College status. The senior management team, led by the headteacher, have not managed to establish satisfactory science provision, effective procedures to help staff deal consistently well with behavioural problems, or communication systems which convince some parents, staff and pupils that their views are adequately heard. Middle management is generally effective, and in some cases, notably art and geography, outstanding but is unsatisfactory in science. Governors are effective. They know their school well, give sound advice and fulfil most of their statutory duties. However, requirements for religious education in Years 10 to 13 and for the daily act of worship are not met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' views of the school are more positive than at the time of the previous inspection. They believe that the school provides good teaching and sets high expectations, but some express concerns about the trend in examination results, the behaviour of a minority, the quality of teaching in science and mathematics and the lack of consultation on planned changes. The vast majority of pupils consider they are at a good school, but many are anxious about the behaviour of other pupils and the possibility of bullying. Inspectors find that bullying is dealt with well by the school, much teaching is very good and results have been improving since 2001. However, they agree that the quality of teaching and learning in science should be higher, as should the behaviour of a minority.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise the quality of provision in science to match that already found in most other departments.
 - Establish new and effective systems that enable staff to deal consistently with the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a minority of pupils.
 - Take urgent action to ensure stability and quality in the staffing of the mathematics department.
 - Ensure teaching and pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 rises to the school's overall levels.
 - Further improve the quality and range of special educational needs management and support.
- and, to meet statutory requirements:
- Give adequate time for religious education in the sixth form.

- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT WOOTTON BASSETT SCHOOL

The sixth form has 207 students, drawn from Year 11 of the main school. 24 AS and A2 courses and 6 as AVCEs are offered, plus a substantial enhancement programme

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good sixth form in which students achieve well. Standards are well above average; 'added-value' in results is positive and improving further. After a decline soon after the last inspection, standards are recovering well due to very good teaching and learning, the good curriculum, good leadership and monitoring of progress and the very positive attitudes of students. Cost effectiveness is very good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards overall are well above average and rising.
- Achievement or added-value is good overall, and has been consistently strong in art, design and technology, geography, physics, general studies and mathematics.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students show very positive attitudes; they contribute very well to school and community life.
- The sixth form management team collaborate effectively and monitor progress very well.
- Provision is very good in most of the subjects inspected and excellent in art.
- Standards in modern languages and chemistry are average while in most subjects they are higher.
- Recent results have shown negative added-value in history, law and theatre studies.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English language is very good . Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve well. The subject is very well led and managed. Provision in French is very good . The most recent A2 results were well above average; current standards are average but students are making good progress. Teaching and learning are both very good.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is very good . Teaching and learning are both very good so that students progress very well. Student's attitudes are particularly positive.
Science	Provision in chemistry is satisfactory . Teaching is satisfactory by national standards but lacks the effectiveness seen in the sixth form as a whole. Students make broadly satisfactory achievement over their two years in the sixth form.
Information and communication technology	Provision in ICT is good . Teaching is good and students achieve well. The subject is very well led and managed.
Humanities	Provision in geography is very good . The subject benefits from excellent leadership and management and very good teaching. Standards are well above average and students are very positive. Provision in psychology is very good . Teaching and learning are very effective and students achieve well.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in product design is very good . Students make very good progress because the subject is very well taught and managed.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in AVCE art and design is excellent . Standards are well above average and in terms of the students' prior attainment this indicates remarkable added-value. Teaching and leadership are excellent.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in sports studies is very good . Teaching and leadership and management are all very good, enabling students to make very effective

Business	progress. Provision in economics and business is very good . It is very well organised and taught and students achieve well.
General education	Provision in general studies, key skills and the enhancement programme is very good . All these elements are managed far more effectively than usual and offer students very valuable opportunities for personal and academic development.

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

Overall the **advice, guidance and support** provided for students are very good. Relatively few find themselves on courses to which they are unsuited and a high proportion proceed to the career or higher education place of their choice. The personal and academic support and guidance from tutors and sixth form leadership are very effective.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is good and **management arrangements are very good**. The combined impact of the director of sixth form and his colleagues is very effective and ensures a good curriculum to meet students' varied needs, with close monitoring of their academic and personal progress. Standards, once declining, are now rising rapidly. Collaboration with subject and pastoral leaders helps ensure high-quality teaching. The scope provided for students' personal development through service to others, for example, mentoring Year 7 pupils, is excellent.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have very positive attitudes in lessons and are, overall, strongly supportive of the provision they receive. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire said they enjoy being in the sixth form and those interviewed supported this key judgement. A significant proportion felt enrichment activities, advice on entry to the sixth form and careers were weak, but inspectors found that these features were better than in sixth forms nationally. A large proportion believed their views were not sought satisfactorily: inspectors found that consultation usually proceeds very well, but important exceptions occur.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils make good progress and achieve well across the school. Standards are above average and well above average in the sixth form. Girls reach higher standards than boys. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good from Years 10 to 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good and standards are rising at each stage in pupils' education.
- At the end of Years 9 and 11, overall standards are above the average for all schools.
- In Year 11, standards seen by inspectors were well above average in art, music and religious education, and recent examinations revealed well above average results in geography and mathematics.
- In the main school, achievement and results are lower in science, history and design and technology than in most other subjects.
- Middle and lower attainers overall reach higher than expected results at GCSE, but those with identified special educational needs do not progress as well as other pupils.
- A* to C results at GCSE lack the consistency in improvement seen most other aspects of GCSE over the last three years. However, added-value is good.
- In the sixth form, standards are well above average overall and in several of the subjects focused upon during the inspection, notably: art, geography, physical education, mathematics and economics and business.
- Sixth form standards seen during the inspection are currently no more than average in chemistry and modern languages and there has been too little added-value in recent chemistry, law and theatre studies results at A level.

Commentary

1. Pupils are making good progress in lessons in the main school as a whole and long-term achievement is good. Essentially this is because teaching and learning are good and the school and subjects are well managed. Standards in Year 9 tests in English, mathematics and science have, since the current headteacher's arrival in 2001, all risen at a faster rate than nationally. Staff deployment changes within the science department have helped results rise there, while in all three core subjects a greater focus on understanding the implications of assessment data and the improved use of target-setting have been beneficial. Collective results in core subjects at the end of Year 9 are average for schools with similar intakes and are well above the average for all schools. Attainment in English, however, is not as high as in the other core subjects. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory when all subjects are considered.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.2 (33.6)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	38.5 (36.8)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	36.0 (33.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 228 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Recent GCSE results show a marked improvement in added-value across Years 10 and 11 and there is currently good overall achievement. Standards seen during the inspection were

well above average in several individual subjects and above average in most. Results were well above average in last year's examination in geography and mathematics. The collective GCSE results show A* to G performance improving rapidly so that middle and lower attainers are now reaching far higher standards than similar pupils do nationally. These positive trends are again linked to teachers, subject leaders and those monitoring progress at whole-school level giving a very clear picture of what is required to raise standards and using data effectively to modify how they teach. In addition, the curriculum for middle and lower attainers has been altered to include courses which motivate such pupils more effectively.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	60 (64)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (91)	91(91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.4 (34.7)	38.7(34.7)

There were 240 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Recent Year 11 results in some subjects have been lower in science, history and design and technology than in most other subjects, confirmed by standards seen by inspectors. Current standards in science are below the average for all schools, and pupils are making too little progress because leadership and management and provision overall in the subject lack the vision and efficiency to ensure adequate or better achievement by pupils. History standards and those in design and technology are improving, though are still behind other subjects.
- A* to C results at GCSE, a key indicator of the performance of higher-attaining pupils, have not matched the marked improvement made by other pupil groups. Standards amongst higher-attaining pupils have lacked consistency over the last five years, though they have always been well above national figures. Such pupils are now an increasing focus in the school and the gifted and talented programme is now more established and is beginning to ensure that lessons always have extension work. Further challenge is available through the out-of-lessons programme. The gifted and talented generally progress as well as the majority of pupils, except in science and English in Years 7 to 9. Their achievement is especially good in art, where the outreach programme from the Royal Academy provides them with the opportunity to draw from life. In modern languages and especially in German pupils achieve very well, as they do in geography also.
- Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They make sound gains in their reading ages, sometimes making over one year's improvement in less than six months. They gain creditable GCSE results, with some at the higher grades of A* to C, in subjects that include art and design, design and technology and geography. Pupils with statements of special educational needs make satisfactory progress towards the targets set at their annual reviews, which include educational and behavioural areas. However, achievement is satisfactory rather than good because the leadership of SEN has only recently become effective and there is scope for better guidance to support staff and an increase in their number if pupils are to make good progress.
- There are 27 pupils designated as having English as an additional language. Of these pupils, only two are at an early stage of learning English, and they receive appropriate support from the local education authority. One of the two pupils at an early stage of learning English achieves very well, mainly because of individual specialised support and considerable personal effort to integrate well into school life. This pupil is now preparing successfully for GCSEs. Overall, other students with English as an additional language reach standards as high as others in their groups or sets.

7. Boys underachieve compared with girls especially in Years 10 and 11. The school is aware of this issue and has begun to tackle it through greater use of curricular options, including vocational courses and work-related learning, as well as through a range of classroom strategies.

The sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	96.1 (95.6)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	34.6 (35.0)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	280.9 (284.4)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 108 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

8. The sixth form's students are achieving well, with positive gains or added-value in the great majority of subjects; this trend is rising. A decline in standards dating from about 1998 has been reversed and they are now again well above average overall, the case in several of the subjects focused upon during the inspection, notably: art, geography, physical education, mathematics and economics and business. These positive areas of achievement are the outcome of good, frequently very good, subject leadership, with well-designed courses, highly effective monitoring of students' progress and very stimulating teaching. In addition, the positive attitudes of students contribute well to the process. The good leadership and very good management of the sixth form ensure that a strongly positive climate for learning pervades its work.
9. Students identified as gifted and talented achieve very well in almost all subject areas. In art their work is outstanding. Painting inspired by a drawing course undertaken in Venice is a notable feature of this very high-quality artwork. In mathematics, those studying further mathematics usually obtain the highest grades possible.
10. There has been too little added-value in recent results at A level in chemistry, law and theatre studies. In chemistry, standards seen by inspectors were only average and teaching quality and leadership of the subject place limits on students' learning. In law and theatre studies, new strategies to raise standards are being actively sought.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attendance is very good. Attitudes and behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions, are satisfactory. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. In the sixth form, students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In most lessons, pupils and students are keen to learn and behaviour is good.
- Procedures to maintain good behaviour are not used consistently, and some pupils disrupt lessons.
- Sixth form students have a very good involvement with pupils in the main school.
- Attendance is well above the average for secondary schools nationally.
- The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.

Commentary

11. Attendance is well above the national average for comprehensive schools. Parents recognise the need for good attendance. The school's procedures to monitor attendance are good, but do not enable a rapid response to be made when there are unexplained absences or internal truancy. Generally pupils are punctual at the start of school sessions and to lessons.
12. Attitudes to school and to learning and pupils' behaviour are varied. The majority of pupils are keen to be involved in the many opportunities that the school provides through timetabled lessons, extra-curricular activities and out of school trips. Opportunities for vocational study have improved the attitudes of a group of disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons, pupils of all ages and abilities demonstrate a strong sense of achievement; they are keen to learn, and are interested and focused.
13. However, a significant minority of lessons are disrupted by off-task behaviour, which teachers do not deal with in a consistent manner. It is usually, but not always, boys who wilfully disrupt lessons, affecting their own and others' learning. Pupils in all year groups complain that there is too much poor behaviour, which they feel is sometimes a consequence of large class or tutor group sizes, but at other times a reaction to teachers' weak class management and inconsistent expectations. In assemblies, where senior members of staff are present, behaviour is very good.
14. Relationships are generally good and are a feature of the best lessons. There is some bullying in most year groups. Pupils say that when instances are reported teachers deal with it well; the trained peer mentors in the sixth form are not as effective as they could be, partly because they have no fixed base at which pupils can contact them. Exclusions are low for a school of this size.
15. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. In many subjects there has been no specific planning for the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; consequently, the consistency and effectiveness across all curricular areas is variable. Religious education, personal, health and social education, citizenship, art, drama and geography all make a good contribution to the spiritual development of pupils. For example, discussions in sex education link intimacy between human beings with spiritual as well as physical experiences. Although spiritual development is better than at the last inspection it lacks the consistency to be judged satisfactory. Whilst assemblies often carry strong moral and social messages, they remain weak in providing opportunities for pupils to reflect on matters relating to the human spirit. Tutor periods usually provide a good start to the school day, but they are rarely used as a time for reflection. The school fails to meet its statutory duty to provide a daily act of worship.
16. Most pupils understand the principles of right and wrong and the impact of their behaviour on others. Through the school council, pupils have been involved in creating codes of conduct, which some tutor periods and assemblies successfully reinforce. Whole-school procedures, however, are not clear and consistent enough to manage the behaviour and attitudes of those pupils who disrupt learning in some classes.
17. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to become involved in school life and the wider community. The school council, for example, has worked with the local town council on a scheme to improve the neighbourhood environment. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not have enough opportunities to exercise responsibility within the school community, for example as prefects or house captains, although they work hard to co-ordinate the school's charitable work for the community at harvest and Christmas times.

18. The school's enrichment week, drama productions and residential visits provide a breadth of experiences that strengthen pupils' understanding of their cultural heritage. The high-quality art experienced within the school and on visits to galleries make a significant contribution to this. Topics in religious education, design and technology and art contribute to pupils' understanding of other cultures, but planning for multicultural awareness is not evident in all subject areas.

The sixth form

19. Students have very positive attitudes to their studies and are keen to do well. Attendance is very good. In lessons, very good and often excellent attitudes are seen; students engage in sophisticated discussion and demonstrate good, independent thought. Behaviour is very good.
20. A strength of the sixth form is the number of opportunities to become fully involved in the life of the school, as well as in community and other enrichment activities. Students take full advantage of these opportunities. They lead the school council, act as prefects and house captains, and take responsibility for many of the school's charitable events. Some participate in World Challenges, raising funds and planning their trips to help in worthwhile projects in Bolivia and India. All sixth form students are involved in mentoring Year 7 pupils. Tutor periods are used very effectively to promote students' awareness of a wide range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. For example, the mature debate in one tutorial period helped students to clarify the issues relating to euthanasia.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.3	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.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1431	36	3

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 good. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in the sixth form and the school provides a good formal curriculum with very good enhancement programmes.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the main school is good, especially in Years 10 and 11, while the quality is very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall with evidence of very good and excellent practice.
- Across the school, teaching and learning are excellent in art and very good in geography and religious education.
- Sixth-form teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- Teaching and learning in science are unsatisfactory.
- Teachers generally have very good knowledge of their subject and are good at encouraging and involving pupils.
- A minority of lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, have unsatisfactory teaching, usually where managing pupils' behaviour is ineffective.
- Teaching in mathematics, while currently satisfactory, lacks stability and is less effective than is required if the department's usual high standards are to be maintained.

Commentary

21. Teaching and learning in the school are good. In nearly 95 per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection, the quality was at least satisfactory and in nearly a third of lessons it was very good; in a further five per cent, teaching and learning were both excellent. Such standards arise from well-qualified staff relating effectively to pupils and encouraging the great majority of them to work hard and learn effectively in nearly all of their lessons. Most use structures that help pupils to see the objectives of the lesson from the outset, sustain good pace, involve pupils actively and ensure that key points are reinforced, especially at the end of each lesson.
22. Very good and excellent teaching is found across a range of subjects and year groups, but is particularly evident in art, geography and religious education lessons. Teaching in these subjects derives consistency, imagination and high expectations from the fact that leadership is very clear, innovative and determined. Teaching and learning also benefit from highly effective systems for mutual support of staff and for management of pupils in lessons. These demanding criteria lead to pupils in art, geography and religious education making very rapid and secure progress in class and knowing how to work independently, thus making very good achievement over time. Similar factors apply, though slightly less consistently, to teaching in many other subjects, especially in Year 10 and 11 lessons.
23. However, teaching and learning in science are unsatisfactory. While much is good and instances of impressive quality can be found, too many lessons lack the pace, urgency and level of challenge to ensure adequate achievement over time. This essentially reflects unsatisfactory leadership and management of science: common aims and agreed expectations are not clear enough, and the support, guidance and monitoring offered are not having sufficient effect. Pupils' progress is currently unsatisfactory as a result.
24. In mathematics, results have been good for some time, but the current instability in staffing threatens to undermine this success. A significant proportion of teaching at present is being done by teachers on cover or short-term contracts, due to several significant absences. Teaching and learning quality are satisfactory overall, being supported by good departmental leadership and management, but are less effective than in most other departments, and the good mathematics results to date cannot be sustained by only satisfactory provision.
25. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but this compares unfavourably with good quality for the school overall and very good in the sixth form. In a significant minority of lessons across Years 7 to 9, pupils' behaviour is ineffectively managed: through poor knowledge of agreed procedures, or lack of confidence in them, the teacher's attention is absorbed for longer than it should be by dealing with challenging attitudes and disruptive behaviour from a minority. This leads to unsatisfactory teaching and learning in about nine per cent of lessons and stops a proportion of satisfactory or good lessons becoming the very effective occasions they might otherwise have been. In the majority of cases, such lessons are taught by staff relatively new to the school or new to teaching and are very rare in well-

managed departments. They indicate that monitoring and support of teaching at whole-school level has yet to acquire the rigour and impact needed for all teachers to know precisely how they should proceed in difficult circumstances and for senior managers to know that such steps are always followed.

26. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. In the best lessons, support assistants are managed effectively, and teachers have a good knowledge of how to set work that is at just the right level for each individual pupil, producing good learning. However, in a small number of lessons, behaviour management is not effective enough, pupils do not try as hard as they should and learning is less than satisfactory.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 210 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
11 (5.2 %)	69 (32.7 %)	78 (36.9 %)	40 (18.9 %)	11 (5.2%)	1 (0.5 %)	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.

The sixth form

27. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good. With few exceptions, teachers combine very secure expertise in their subjects with high expectations of their students. Relationships in lessons are a strength. Teachers are generally very well informed about students' aptitudes and the targets they are working to and take every opportunity to show students how to improve their work. Many use their detailed knowledge of examination-board requirements to good effect in focusing attention on specific areas of knowledge and skills or on students' approaches to analysing questions. In sixth form teaching overall, there are no significant weaknesses. In most of the subjects inspected, the overall quality is very good, reflecting a high degree of consistency within departments. In art, teaching and learning are excellent, due to the particularly high quality of leadership, the exemplary skill and commitment of staff and their expectation that students of every background will achieve to the very best of their ability. Teaching and learning in chemistry are no more than satisfactory, because such motivational and organisational skills are much less evident and expectations are lower than in the sixth form as a whole.

The curriculum

The overall quality of the formal curriculum is already good, and valuable improvements are being put in place. The programmes which enhance formal provision are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is innovative, considerably enhancing pupils' learning.
- A good range of traditional and vocational GCSE courses caters for pupils of all abilities in Years 10 and 11.
- The extensive number of extra-curricular activities is very well supported by pupils and students.
- Students in the sixth form have a very wide choice of courses.
- Enrichment opportunities for students in the sixth form are very good.
- Because religious education is not taught in the sixth form, the school is in breach of its statutory requirements.
- Some classes are too large for the size of room in which they are taught.
- There is insufficient provision for pupils' and students' spiritual development, or for preparation for living in a culturally diverse society.

Commentary

28. The curriculum, underpinned by a clear philosophy of meeting pupils' individual abilities and aptitudes, is well balanced and offers very good breadth of opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 11 and for students in the sixth form. Most subjects are taught in mixed-ability groups, but there are sheltered groups for pupils of lower ability in a number of subjects, and setting by ability in modern languages. All statutory subjects are taught, and the curriculum is enriched by drama, and by ICT; the latter is taught as a key skill from Year 7, giving pupils the opportunity to take the GCSE examination in IT in Year 9. Citizenship is taught within the personal development programme, and in identified subjects across the curriculum. The timetable for Year 7 is suspended for a complete day twice a year so that pupils can explore their personal learning styles in 'Learning to Learn' sessions. A highly innovative provision, 'Curriculum Plus', further enhances the curriculum in Years 8 and 9: pupils choose a course of study that reflects their particular interests, from options including sport, art, performing arts, a second language, science or applied mathematics. Pupils who have difficulties with English are encouraged to use this time to take a support class. Younger pupils spoke enthusiastically about these opportunities, which they felt demonstrated the school's concern to cater for them as individuals.
29. The curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. They are educated with their peers most of the time, with adaptations made to meet individual needs. For example, some effective small groups are formed to improve pupils' skills in writing and spelling. In Years 10 and 11, pupils gain Youth Awards at bronze and sometimes silver levels, and their attitudes to the course are positive. However, individual educational programmes have not been widely enough used until recently, and they are not yet effective enough for their impact on pupils' achievement to be seen.
30. Good extra-curricular arrangements for gifted and talented pupils include master classes and challenge competitions in mathematics, as well as a weekend residential course. Year 10 pupils attend a special course for gifted linguists at the Braeside Centre. Good contacts between the physical education department and local clubs enable talented sportsmen and women to achieve at the highest level. One pupil, for example, competes at international level in gymnastics. Within the curriculum provision is also good, as exemplified by Curriculum Plus arrangements that provide more able mathematicians with the opportunity to enjoy the challenge of more advanced mathematical studies and puzzles, and by the provision of an express Spanish for beginners course in Year 10.
31. In recognition of its recently acquired status as a technology college, the school offers a number of technology-related courses, and pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a wide range of traditional and vocational GCSE courses from which to choose. For pupils who are in danger of underperforming because of poor behaviour or truancy, the school provides work-related courses in association with a local college. Some anomalies occur as a result of the two-week timetable arrangements: in foundation subjects in Years 7 to 9, pupils may have excessively long gaps between lessons; a number of double-length lessons in geography in Year 10 and Year 12 are split across lunchtime.
32. Accommodation is good. Much of the new purpose-built school provides very good facilities and a high-quality learning environment. The accommodation for the majority of subjects is state of the art, and rooms are well equipped with VCR, television and interactive whiteboard facilities. ICT is well provided for and is an essential feature of the well-resourced Learning Resources Centre. Specialist facilities such as laboratories and computer bases are well equipped and fully networked. The design of many areas encourages civilised behaviour, and the flow of pupils around the school is good, apart from in the science area, where the problem is under review. Bright and interesting displays that often celebrate pupils' subject achievement are apparent. The management of the accommodation is very good, and there is a clear awareness of possible developments. However, there are problems with overcrowding in some rooms, especially in physical education, ICT, science and modern languages, where

large class sizes inhibit teaching and learning and create difficulties for class management and organisation. As a result of building to the minimum specification, circulation is difficult and teachers cannot intervene effectively with individuals. Dining facilities are far too small so that the school requires two dinner sittings; this heavily affects the shape of the school day, placing limits on lunchtime activities and other aspects of its work.

33. Learning resources overall are very good and meet pupils' learning needs well. Provision for ICT is very good and broadband Internet access is excellent. Electronic whiteboards are often in use in classrooms, helping to stimulate pupils' interest in learning. Subject resources are generally well managed, and the strategic planning of resources and accommodation for the present and future needs of the school is very good.
34. The school has enough well-qualified staff for most subject areas. However, lack of continuity in staffing has led to problems in mathematics and science.
35. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good. It is well supported by a comprehensive scheme of work that includes citizenship and careers advice, as well as sex education and information about the dangers of misusing drugs. The programme is well planned and the overall leadership and management of a large team of staff are very good. Each year group in the main school has appropriate modules relating to healthy lifestyle, personal development, sex and relationships and active citizenship. There is also a contribution to the provision of religious education with a module in Year 11 on alternative religions. The school works within the context of the local authority's health education arrangements and has recently updated personal safety materials, worked with the local authority's chief school nurse to provide in-service training in sex and relationship education and planned a forthcoming drugs awareness evening for parents... There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities in sport, music and drama, and cultural development is further supported by visits to theatres, art galleries, field trips and foreign trips. Most departments also organise booster classes to help pupils revise for standard attainment tests and GCSE examinations. However, opportunities for developing pupils' understanding of ethnic minority cultures are limited and there are too few opportunities for students to reflect on the spiritual dimension of their work in lessons.

The sixth form

36. Entry to the sixth form is available to all students who acquire a minimum of four C grades at GCSE, although individual subjects may require higher grades. For instance, pupils who have taken double science are expected to have a grade B for an A level course. Prospective sixth form students may select courses from thirty subjects, including six vocational subjects. Most students in Year 12 select four AS courses, and from these select three for A2 study in Year 13. Students are encouraged to broaden their interests and take responsibility for community events. One half day each week is allocated to complementary curriculum activities. All are expected to fulfil the requirements for the ASDAN award, by undertaking commitments such as mentoring younger pupils. The sixth form social committee organises regular events and raises significant sums for local, national and global charities.
37. Good links have been established with higher education institutions. There are regular opportunities for students to visit university open days. For students who are gifted and talented, the provision is sufficiently flexible to meet their particular needs; for instance, one student has taken A level Hebrew, another A level Japanese. Entry for various competitions further enhances the curriculum offered to gifted and talented students in the sixth form. In mathematics, for example, they achieve consistently good results in the national mathematics challenge and kangaroo competitions. In business studies, students' understanding of the stock market and how it works is improved by entering the Pro-Share competition for high fliers in economics.

Care, guidance and support

The procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. The support, advice and guidance for pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development, are satisfactory. The extent to which the school seeks to involve pupils in its work and development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pastoral care is good.
- Pupils' attainment is assessed well, and good support is given to all groups of pupils.
- Induction arrangements and support for pupils who join during the school year are good.
- Pupils work in a safe and secure environment.
- Pupils have a limited involvement in important areas of school development.

Commentary

38. Procedures to ensure the health and safety of all pupils are thorough. Risk assessments for activities within the school and for out-of-school trips are fully in place. Sound procedures are established to deal with child protection issues, although some staff need further training. Pastoral support, especially in Year 7, is good. In general, the tutorial period in the morning provides a useful start to the day, and there are set programmes in most classes for the use of this time.
39. Pupils have access to good advice and guidance, on pastoral and academic matters, from teachers and tutors. They set targets in all subjects, based on prior performance, and are challenged to do better than average. Pupils with special educational needs, those who are gifted or talented and those whose first language is not English are identified early and appropriate support arranged. All pupils have opportunities to discuss their progress with their tutor. Lessons in personal, health and social education enable all pupils to understand how to identify appropriate career paths. Pupils who are disaffected with school life are well supported, especially those in Years 10 and 11; some are involved in a very worthwhile scheme whereby they work on an allotment under the supervision of the manager; others attend part-time vocational courses at college.
40. Induction arrangements for pupils joining from the local feeder primary schools are good. Some have opportunities to be involved in drama or sporting activities before they join the school.
41. All pupils can offer their ideas during tutorial periods, on how to improve the school through the school council system. Pupils have achieved some success in making changes, for example, to the summer uniform and in helping to tackle the litter problem. However, the council is not involved in presenting pupils' views on major developments within the school; several pupils expressed concern to inspectors about revisions to the school day, and although pupils were involved in reviewing rewards and setting a code of conduct, they have not been involved in discussions about tackling poor behaviour.
42. Careers education is well established within the PSHE programme in the preparation for option choice in Year 9, work experience in Year 10 and in careers interviews in Year 11. The co-ordinator works closely with the available Connexions service staff provided by the local authority to support careers advice to all pupils including those with special educational needs and those with attendance, personal or health issues. The Careers library is also well established and the post-holder has plans in place next term to reclassify new computer software and brochures to meet the new classification arrangements required by the Connexions service. There are some issues for the co-ordinator in trying to place work experience pupils in local employment providers. The provision of school-based staff to assist the post-holder with administration of Careers is very helpful.

The sixth form

43. Induction into the sixth form is thorough and very few students request changes to their courses. Students are assessed using established national criteria. They set challenging targets for their own performance based on previous achievement.
44. Advice on future careers and making applications for university is good, but some students receive too little help from the Connexions service in exploring other avenues for their future, for example with modern apprenticeships.
45. Students are involved with pupils in the main school in a variety of ways, especially as prefects and house captains. All members of the sixth form act as mentors to Year 7 tutor groups. They contribute well to the school council. However, although this enables students to effect changes in particular areas, it does not focus discussion on school development. Many students, especially those in Year 12, were upset that there was no proper consultation before changes in the school day from September 2004 were presented.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have a good involvement in helping others in the local and wider community.
- Some parents have concerns about behaviour and bullying, and also feel they are not consulted as they should be about school developments.
- Information provided for parents, including reports on progress, is good.
- Good liaison is developing between the school and local organisations.
- As part of its new technology college status, the school plans to become more involved with the local community.

Commentary

46. The school has established good links with the local and wider community, which should become more effective as the school's programme for technology status develops. It is anticipated, for example, that the school will hold training sessions for members of the public in the use of computers. The school council, working with the town council, is planning improvements to the local environment for neighbouring residents. Pupils are involved in raising funds for a number of charities, such as sponsoring a guide dog; they contribute to the local community by distributing gifts at harvest and at Christmas. There is a strong involvement with higher educational establishments for the training of teachers. Links with feeder primary schools are good and ease transfer into the secondary school, although many curricular links are at an early stage of development.
47. Parents contribute to school life by their attendance at events, and a parent and teacher association organises fund-raising and social events. Most parents ensure that their children attend school regularly and communicate well with the school using pupils' planners.
48. Parents express broad satisfaction with the school, although some have concerns about behaviour, bullying and the extent to which the parent body is consulted about planned changes in school, for example to the revision of the school day. The information provided to parents is usually good, and the developing website is frequently accessed by parents as well as students. There are ample opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress with teachers, and regular surgeries when parents may discuss other issues. Written reports generally indicate pupils' strengths and weaknesses in each subject area.

The sixth form

49. Progress is regularly assessed and students and their parents are kept well informed. A minority of students feel that they are not sufficiently consulted about school matters, in particular about changes to the school day. Students have ample opportunities to visit colleges and universities to which they may apply. They contribute to local and international charities with a variety of fund-raising schemes.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good with some very good features; there are also areas to improve. Governance is sound.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has been very successful in: reversing the declining trend in standards he inherited; significantly improving the curriculum; ensuring the school acquired technical college status, making good appointments to key posts and setting in train a series of staff training initiatives.
- There is very good leadership and management of many subjects and the quality is excellent in art and geography.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good and management arrangements very effective.
- Leadership and management of science are unsatisfactory.
- Procedures to help staff deal consistently well with behavioural problems are ineffective.
- Some parents, staff and pupils find that their views are inadequately heard.
- Financial management is very good.
- In some areas of self-evaluation, the headteacher and senior managers have underestimated problems associated with, for example, the performance of the science department, the behaviour of some pupils and successfully communicating plans and policies.

Commentary

50. The headteacher has achieved a great deal during his three years in post, most of one year being dominated by the successful transfer of the school into its new premises. From about 1998, the school's A level results had been declining sharply, as were the collective results for core subjects in Year 9 tests. GCSE performance levelled off and the school's A* to G results were disappointing. Since his arrival in 2001, the headteacher has helped staff to focus effectively on strategies for raising attainment. His success is evident in recent improvements in added value in the sixth form, in Year 9 test results in core subjects and in many aspects of GCSE performance. By direction, encouragement, new appointments and changes in staff deployment, he has ensured that proper weight is given to such strategies as: setting targets and monitoring pupils' progress towards them; modifying the curricular provision for particular groups of pupils; and encouraging staff to plan for pupils' varied learning needs. In addition, the headteacher's role has been crucial to the school's successful bid for technology college status and the preparation of its bid for training school status. In all these areas, the close co-operation and very good support of senior colleagues contributes effectively to the leadership and management of the school. There is good teamwork and delegation. Individuals have clearly defined responsibilities that they pursue with considerable independence, for example, in areas such as assessment co-ordination and the professional development of colleagues. The school runs a flourishing and effective programme for initial teacher training. Professional development opportunities are frequent, well managed and carefully linked to the requirements of the staff and the school.
51. The school also benefits from much good leadership and management by heads of subject and key stage. In several subjects, notably religious education, ICT, modern languages and physical education, the quality is very good, while in art and in geography, it is exemplary.

These areas illustrate forcibly the benefits of leadership that is highly informed, strongly analytical and committed to the very highest standards, and backed by consistent and thorough management approaches. Teaching is closely monitored and well supported and pupils know to expect the best from staff and give of their best in return. The leadership and management of the provision for gifted and talented pupils is very good, in both the main school and the sixth form. The co-ordinator is very enthusiastic. She has produced a very good long-term plan for developing provision for gifted and talented students in the school, and is implementing it effectively. She is also involved in an action research project funded by the local education authority and published in the Wiltshire Education Journal. The lessons learned from this project inform and enhance the very good work that is already taking place.

52. Leadership and management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. Recent developments in monitoring and the involvement of senior managers have tackled weaknesses in provision, and procedures are now in place to bring about sound progress. The new Code of Practice is securely in place, and the school has made good progress in promoting disability access, as required by regulations that came into force in 2002.
53. The co-ordinator for English as an additional language manages the reception and induction of new pupils well. Such pupils often arrive at times other than the beginning of the year. She holds initial interviews with the parents, establishes pupils' needs and helps with their integration into the school. The staff have not received any recent training in the needs of pupils with English as an additional language, although the local education authority is willing to provide it.
54. Leadership and management of science, however, are unsatisfactory. The vision and sense of direction required for good leadership are poorly developed. Many individuals work hard and effectively, but these benefits are not capitalised upon. Collectively, the department lacks the management systems required to ensure high and consistent standards in teaching, marking, target-setting, monitoring pupils' performance and managing their behaviour. The lack of such arrangements and shared practice exacerbates staffing pressures that strong leadership and management could minimise. Senior managers have taken many steps to improve provision, with some beneficial impact, for example, on Year 9 test results. However, problems have persisted too long because evaluation of the department's effectiveness has underestimated the severity of its problems and the more radical and decisive action required has yet to be imposed.
55. There is a degree of underestimation of needs in other areas. There are shortcomings in arrangements for managing the behaviour of the minority of pupils with negative attitudes and others inclined to follow their lead. While systems exist, they do not deal effectively enough with the problem. Too many teachers do not know and instinctively follow the same agreed procedures to head off poor behaviour the moment it appears. A minority of lessons also lack the structure and approach commended by the training teachers have recently received, and the rigour of monitoring has been insufficient to identify and rectify this problem. Similarly, many changes have been introduced, usually with good consultation, but there are inconsistencies in the process. Goodwill has been lost, especially amongst parents, but also Year 12 students, over the manner in which proposed changes to the school day were presented. Also, some staff, pupils and parents are right to seek a more visible senior team setting the tone around the premises, interacting with pupils before, during and after school.
56. The governing body has a secure general knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their awareness of some specific features, such as the very high level of success in some departments and the extent of the problems in science, lacks detail. The dissemination of information through meetings and reports works effectively. Some governors also see the school in action through visits during the school day, but this source of first-hand knowledge is less extensive than in other schools. Governors support and challenge senior managers satisfactorily, and contribute to the refining of planning objectives. There is scope for

them to present more of their own strategic initiatives for the headteacher's consideration. Most statutory duties are met and governors have contributed consistently well to the school's efficient financial management. Statutory requirements are still to be met for religious education in the sixth form and for the daily act of collective worship

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,819,750	Balance from previous year	96,525
Total expenditure	4,897,429	Balance carried forward to the next	18,846
Expenditure per pupil	3,251		

The sixth form

57. The head of sixth form leads well, setting a good tone for post-16 work and students' social and personal development. His collaboration with assistant heads of sixth form and with tutors has led to very good management arrangements being established and the formal curriculum, enrichment programme and tutorial work are very well organised. As a result, students find themselves on suitable courses, well prepared for later career and study options and most effectively supported and encouraged during their post-16 years. Their academic progress is monitored more effectively than usual and their involvement in helpful work with younger pupils, such as mentoring Year 7 or with community groups, is excellent because of highly efficient organisation by staff and very positive attitudes on the part of students.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and pupils achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Teaching and learning are good, although better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.
- Higher-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not achieve high enough standards.
- Good management is bringing about improvement in identified weaknesses.

Commentary

58. Results of the national tests in Year 9 are above average. They have improved over the last three years, having gone down in 2001. Results are above average at levels 5 and 6, but below average at level 7. This represents unsatisfactory achievement compared to pupils' prior attainment. Pupils did less well in English than in mathematics and science.
59. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm these above-average standards. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory. Most pupils achieve well, but the highest-attaining and the gifted and talented pupils do not attain as highly as they should. Management has identified weaknesses through careful monitoring, and is bringing about improvement in a variety of ways. For instance, an underachieving group (mostly boys) has been identified and provided with specific targets for improvement and extra mentoring. Also, schemes of work are constantly updated, to ensure all areas of the curriculum, especially different types of writing, are covered. Standards are highest in reading. Higher-attaining pupils write accurately, but lack variety in sentence structure. They analyse language, for example imagery in *The Pike*, in detail. Average-attaining pupils, the majority, have high standards of reading and support their ideas well with quotations. Their writing is suitable for its purpose and reasonably accurate in spelling and punctuation. Lower-attaining readers lack fluency in reading, but understand character, for example in *Macbeth*, well. Presentation is often untidy, at all levels, but is much improved when redrafted, especially on the computer.
60. Results in the GCSE examinations are above average. They have been similar for the last three years in English, but have varied from above to well above average in English literature. Pupils gain a high proportion of grades A* and A. Girls do much better than boys, by more than is common nationally, especially in English. These results represent good achievement from pupils' prior attainment in Year 9. Pupils do better in English than in most of their other subjects.
61. Standards of work seen during inspection week confirm standards as above average. Achievement is good, and pupils gain ground quickly, with many pupils producing very high quality work by Year 11. This is because, compared to Years 7 to 9: classes in Year 11 are smaller; pupils are more mature and ready to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by open-ended tasks; teaching is better; and the ability range within the classes is less wide. Higher-attaining pupils are articulate and confident. They have a wide vocabulary and produce convincing and sophisticated argument in written work. They are original thinkers, but ideas are well grounded in the text. They read perceptively, but do not extend their reading sufficiently. Those studying *Of Mice and Men*, for example, could usefully have been encouraged to read *The Grapes of Wrath*. Lower-attaining pupils use punctuation and paragraphs, but need

constant reminders. They use colloquial expressions in written work. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11.

62. Teaching and learning are good. They are much better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, where there is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Occasionally, the quality of teaching is better than the learning that takes place, because a significant minority of pupils misbehave, and some, especially boys, do not have sufficient pride in their work to want to improve. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and are skilful in asking questions that assess and deepen understanding. Lessons are well structured, with pupils clear about what they are doing and why, and often ending with a precise review of what has been learned. Talk, especially paired discussion, is used well to explore ideas. Assessment is good, especially so in Years 10 and 11. Pupils know what their strengths are and how to improve. Marking is thorough and effective. Where teaching is most effective, lessons are interesting and engaging for all pupils, but sometimes planning does not take into account the wide range of attainment in the class, and some pupils become bored.
63. The department is well managed. Standards and teaching are closely monitored to bring about improvement. Leadership of the department is very good, providing very good role models and having clear vision for the future of the department. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. A decline in standards has been effectively halted.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

64. Standards of literacy are above average. Pupils read widely. The library, for example, is running a successful 'Bookworm', scheme for Year 7, and pupils read in registration time. They write in a variety of ways for different purposes. In some subject areas, especially the humanities, pupils are taught how to improve writing. In history, for example, pupils' writing improved when they were taught how to organise their arguments using persuasive language. Most, though not all, subjects teach important subject vocabulary carefully. There is no whole-school strategy for marking, however, and spellings are rarely corrected outside English. Provision for improving literacy across the school is efficiently co-ordinated.

Drama

65. All pupils are taught drama in Years 7 to 9. Standards in Year 9 are average. Pupils work co-operatively in small groups, discussing and evolving their dramas. Higher-attaining pupils give thoughtful, imaginative performances. Lower-attaining pupils are self-conscious and giggly, but still join in. They evaluate each other's performances sensibly, boys especially, and are beginning to understand how to use movement around the stage successfully.
66. Results in the GCSE examinations fluctuate from year to year. In 2003 they were average. Pupils did less well in drama than in their other subjects. Standards seen during the inspection were average. Higher-attaining pupils are dedicated and have a professional approach, giving up a lot of time to rehearse for examinations. Lower-attaining pupils approach their drama in a more flippant manner, with enjoyment rather than dedication. Most use drama techniques, some very effectively.
67. Teaching and learning are good and there are some very good features. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and make their lessons enjoyable. They manage classes well so that all pupils are involved. Pupils claimed that some classes are spoilt by indiscipline, but this was not observed. Assessment in Years 10 and 11 is thorough and helpful. New assessment procedures are being introduced in Years 7 to 9, which will bring a better focus to developing pupils' skills progressively in this stage.
68. Visits to the theatre and visits from theatre groups are organised occasionally. Productions are staged, but not every year. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

Modern languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good overall, and often very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Pupils generally behave well and are co-operative.
- A small minority of lower-attaining boys in large Year 8 and 9 groups behave badly.
- The range of trips and extra classes for pupils is extensive.
- ICT development is held up by limited access to ICT rooms of sufficient size.

Commentary

69. In 2003, GCSE results in both French and German were above average. Pupils achieved well to gain these results. Results have remained consistently high over the last three years, although they dipped slightly in 2003 because of many staff changes.
70. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. Pupils achieve well overall, mainly because of good teaching that is influenced positively by the Key Stage 3 Framework for languages. By Year 9, the higher-attaining and gifted and talented pupils have developed their speaking and writing skills very well. They can write and talk about themselves, and for example their holidays, with confidence, especially in German. Progress in writing is good overall across the ability range, although clearer in German than in French. A small minority of pupils, particularly lower-attaining boys in large Year 8 and 9 classes, are difficult to interest in language learning and behave badly.
71. Standards in Year 11 are just above average overall, and are still slightly higher in German than in French. Pupils achieve well overall. In German, the higher-attaining pupils reach good standards in writing, because they learn methodically and carefully how to introduce greater complexity into sentences and the use of tenses. In French, pupils' writing is less detailed and extended, except when they are obliged to write to the more precise demands of examination coursework. Lower-attaining pupils achieve well in the smaller classes formed for them.
72. Teaching and learning are good overall. Pupils often make very good progress in lessons. The main features of nearly all lessons are: the teachers' good use of the foreign language to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills; firm management of behaviour so that pupils listen carefully; and skilled use of the available resources, the overhead projector above all. Teachers encourage their pupils well and, on occasion, use language games to very good effect. However, a few groups of lower-attaining pupils in Years 8 and 9 are unnecessarily large; teachers find responding to the wide variety of pupils' needs in these groups very difficult.
73. Leadership of the department is very good, and the team of very committed teachers works very well together. The implications of the Key Stage 3 Framework have been absorbed, resulting in improvements in teaching approaches and the structure of lessons. The everyday management of the department is very effective, and documentation is meticulous. The range of visits and extra classes for pupils is extensive.
74. Improvement since the last subject inspection is good. Very good standards of management have continued and results have improved.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standards attained by the pupils in public examinations are well above the national average, showing a well above-average rate of improvement.
- In most lessons teaching is good, with much that is very good, so that the majority of pupils continue to achieve well.
- Staffing and recruitment problems have led to unsatisfactory teaching, affecting the pupils' progress in some classes, in spite of good departmental leadership and management.
- The unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of a minority of pupils has an adverse effect on progress for some classes.

Commentary

75. The loss of experienced and very effective staff through illness and due to promotion elsewhere at the end of the summer term 2003 has caused a substantial amount of staff turbulence during this academic year. This has resulted in some unsatisfactory teaching, with some pupils underachieving as a consequence. Prior to this year, however, achievement was very good, and it is still the case that, overall, most pupils have made good progress since starting in the school. Hence, improvement since the time of the last inspection is broadly satisfactory.
76. Pupils' results in 2003 and all recent years were well above average, both in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests (SATs) and in GCSE at Year 11. SAT results have shown an upward trend, above that seen nationally, over recent years. GCSE results fluctuate somewhat from year to year, but have always been well above national averages. There is no significant difference in performance between boys and girls. Given that the pupils came to the school with above-average mathematical skills, these results show that these pupils achieved well. Compared with their previous test scores, pupils had improved at well above the national rate to the end of Year 9 and continued to improve in Years 10 and 11, so that improvement was very good overall in all recent years up to and including 2003. Pupils have gained better results in mathematics than in most of their other subjects.
77. The pupils' work, seen in their books and during lessons, was above average, and showed good achievement over the longer term, as might be expected from the national test and examination results. Some pupils in some classes, however, have made less progress this year than they should have done. In Year 9, higher-attaining pupils did good work on graphs of quadratic functions and could use Pythagoras' theorem to solve problems, plotting journeys using three-figure bearings. Based on last year's test results and work done at that time, some seven in ten pupils would have been expected to reach level 6 or higher by the end of this academic year, but this figure is now closer to six in ten. Standards are still above average. Even those who find mathematics difficult have reasonable basic numerical skills and can, for example, handle basic work with vulgar and decimal fractions. The same variable achievement is evident in pupils' work in Years 10 and 11. Almost all of those seen were clearly capable of gaining a GCSE grade, with most capable of a grade F or better and just over five in ten in line for a grade C or higher. This, however, compares unfavourably with the position at the start of the year, when the predicted figure for higher grades would have been more than six in ten.
78. All pupils, including those few with English as an additional language, achieve similarly. Provision of learning support assistants is adequate and contributes to the overall sound progress of pupils with special educational needs. Most, but not all, teachers are aware of

which pupils need extra assistance, and know their pupils well, so that even when there is no extra support available they enable them to achieve at least as well as might be expected, and often much better.

79. Gifted and talented mathematicians are very well provided for. They are entered for national competitions at junior, intermediate and senior level, achieving a marked degree of success. Through the school's Curriculum Plus arrangements, pupils in Years 8 and 9 are presented with challenging opportunities to consider mathematical puzzles and situations not made available to them elsewhere in the curriculum. There are opportunities for them to participate in Royal Institution master classes at Swindon and attend a week's residential course.
80. The pupils' learning, not surprisingly, reflects the quality of teaching. All of the teachers, including those who are proving less successful, are knowledgeable and qualified to teach mathematics. Many prepare their lessons well and incorporate a variety of activities, which engage the pupils' attention. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards with which two of the mathematics classrooms are equipped. In better lessons, the pace is good, and relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, contributing to the quality of learning. In less successful lessons, teachers do not always know the pupils well and are not fully aware of their capabilities, so that the work lacks challenge. The pupils are not encouraged to look after their work or value it sufficiently, so the presentation of their work is poor and their books contain irrelevant material and graffiti, with pages and covers torn.
81. The department has good arrangements for teachers' continuing professional development. New teachers and students on training benefit from close and supportive supervision. The help and advice given to new staff has enabled them to teach better, even though it has not been completely effective in some cases. Where new teachers are less successful, the situation is often made worse by unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes on the part of the pupils. Nor are these unsatisfactory attitudes entirely confined to lessons taught by the inexperienced or those new to the department; they were, for example, observed in a Year 9 lesson on transformations. The skill and talents of the teacher enabled her to deal effectively with the problems presented by two boys, in particular, who were recalcitrant and disruptive. But it made what could have been a very good learning experience less good, and spoiled the atmosphere in what would otherwise have proved exciting and enjoyable for all concerned. These attitudes are, however, very much outweighed by the vast majority of the pupils, who behave well, work hard and enjoy their mathematics lessons.
82. The leadership and management of mathematics by the head of department and by his deputy are good. Both are very good teachers, setting excellent examples to both pupils and staff. Very good use is made of departmental meetings to develop teachers' expertise and draw the department together.

Mathematics across the curriculum

83. Pupils demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are above the national norm, across the range of subjects they study. There is no question of any being denied access to understanding through lack of number skills. In design and technology, pupils can measure and weigh accurately; their mathematical skills are well supported, as was seen in a Year 9 class, when the pupils disassembled components of a garment and produced an accurate pattern for its replacement. Similarly, in geography and in personal, health and social education there are good examples of graphical skills, with pupils using a range of tables and graphs for work on population growth and personal safety.
84. The school carried out an audit of mathematical skills taught in each department and established a whole-school policy for number in 2001. Most departments make a satisfactory contribution to the pupils' improving numerical understanding, and are implementing their own departmental policies. But there is some variable practice. A policy review and update is planned to take place soon.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in the GCSE examinations is unsatisfactory.
- Important aspects of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.
- Teachers manage their classes well and maintain an orderly atmosphere for learning.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 have improved and demonstrate satisfactory achievement.
- Accommodation and resources for learning are good.

Commentary

85. Results in the national tests taken in Year 9 were above the national average in 2003. These results are a significant improvement over those of recent years, when they have matched the national figures. In most years, boys performed slightly better than girls. When the 2003 results are compared to those of similar schools, they show satisfactory achievement.
86. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that present Year 9 pupils are working at standards close to those of 2003. For example, one group of higher-attaining pupils showed a very good mastery of scientific method when devising an experiment to test the effect of caffeine (in very small quantities!) on reaction times.
87. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 matched the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining a higher grade (A* to C) in a science subject was significantly below that of mathematics and English: over 60 per cent of pupils gained a higher grade in mathematics and English, compared to 46 per cent in a science subject. With the exception of biology taken as a single science, pupils do significantly worse in science examinations than in their other subjects. Standards have been at this level for at least three years and demonstrate unsatisfactory achievement.
88. Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' books and tests scores, particularly the results of the 'mock' GCSE taken in November, indicate that standards have fallen. The proportion of present Year 11 pupils working at the level required for the higher grades is below the national average. Among the pupils taking all three single sciences, pupils perform markedly better in biology than in physics and chemistry, where standards are lower, particularly in chemistry.
89. Overall, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. The teaching in lessons observed ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. The best lessons are full of interesting activities, producing enthusiastic engagement of pupils and resulting in enjoyable and secure learning. Year 7 pupils, learning about chromatography, were fully absorbed by well-designed practical work. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 gained a good understanding of the dentition needed for herbivorous and carnivorous diets, because they worked with a wonderful collection of skulls. Classes are almost always managed well, and teachers maintain an orderly atmosphere in which learning is not disrupted by less motivated pupils. Teaching of lower-attaining pupils, who often have special educational needs, is usually good. Such pupils are in small groups, often supported by teaching assistants and volunteer sixth formers. Sensitive planning of differing activities for individuals provides good learning opportunities. There is good use of ICT to enrich the learning of science from Years 7 to 9.
90. Too many lessons are unsuccessful because there is a lack of clear planning based on achievable learning objectives and the tasks pupils undertake do not provide relevant learning opportunities. There is too much reliance on teachers giving lengthy explanations and assuming that all pupils are listening and absorbing. This often leads to bad timing and

incomplete lessons. Most questions are addressed to the whole class and have only one correct answer; usually only a very small number of pupils offer an answer, which teachers accept as evidence that all are attentive and understanding. Partly because of bad timing, it is rare for a lesson to end with a check on what has actually been learned by all the pupils. Pupils have work in their books, often copied from the board or a textbook, which very few can explain. Although these lessons are orderly and pupils are doing all that is asked of them, learning is unsatisfactory.

91. Leadership and management, both of the subject and within the department, are unsatisfactory. The principal weakness has been a failure to monitor the quality of teaching and take appropriate action to effect improvement. Strategies devised to cope with staff absence have been inadequate. The systems used to assess attainment and progress are unsatisfactory. The lack of a coherent and centrally held database makes the tracking of pupils' achievement very difficult. Although the data held does reveal weaknesses in teaching, effective remedial action does not follow. Developmental planning is not based on accurate analyses of strengths and weaknesses and therefore lacks clear objectives. Strategies intended to achieve desired changes are vague and lack criteria for judging success.
92. Since the last full inspection, improvement has been unsatisfactory. The weaknesses in teaching identified in 1996, when one in five lessons was unsatisfactory, have not been successfully addressed. The last inspection, in 1999, gave no overall judgement on the central issue of the quality of teaching but noted the relatively poor performance of pupils in science compared to mathematics and English and identified areas of unsatisfactory management. These criticisms remain valid.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The overall provision of ICT in the school is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of ICT are very good.
- The time allocation for the teaching of ICT in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- There are good ICT resources in the school. The Intranet in particular is developing well as a tool to aid independent learning.
- Pupils attain above-average standards in the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 and in the external examinations at the end of Year 11.
- There are some weaknesses in teaching in Years 7 to 9, often caused by over-large classes.

Commentary

93. In the 2003 teacher assessments carried out at the end of Year 9, pupils were awarded National Curriculum levels that were above national averages. This situation is reflected in the work seen in classrooms. Current Year 9 pupils attain above-average standards, for example in producing complex control procedures that mimic the operation of a log flume in a theme park. They have developed above-average skills in using spreadsheets to create financial models. They produce a range of documentation of good quality, including posters and other advertising materials. Their work on extended projects draws on real-life situations and shows an above-average grasp of ways in which ICT is used commercially. They annotate their work in a self-evaluation process that develops critical awareness and prepares them well for the next stage of education.
94. The percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades in GCSE examinations in 2003 were just above national averages. The current Year 11 pupils are attaining standards that are at least above average. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of ICT systems that are used in organisations, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with them. They use this knowledge well to develop their own systems, using commercial applications. They have

good analytical skills, which they apply to the problems they work to solve. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the areas covered by the examination syllabus, including the impact of ICT on individuals.

95. The achievement of pupils in all years is good. They enter the school with roughly average standards in ICT and, by Year 11, most pupils have above-average skills. Teaching in Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory. In the examination courses in Years 10 and 11 it is good.
96. Teachers in Years 7 to 9 have adequate knowledge of the ICT curriculum and make good use of the materials offered by the school's Intranet. However, class sizes are too large, and pupils have to double up on machines in most lessons. This causes some poor behaviour, which distracts pupils from learning and adversely affects their progress.
97. In Years 10 and 11, classes are smaller and pupils have one machine each. Teachers are all specialists and have good knowledge of the subject. This is evident in the good quality feedback they give to pupils, in both written and verbal form. They have developed good relationships with their classes, and this gives pupils the confidence to take a full part in question and answer sessions. Assessment is very good and gives pupils clear targets and advice on ways to improve their practice. Teachers promote independent learning through encouraging use of the school's Intranet resources.
98. Leadership and management are very good. The ICT manager has developed a very clear vision of the way ahead and generated a very good development plan for the department. He is a very good role model, who has worked hard to develop the resources on the school website and Intranet. He has analysed the examination data well and this has informed development planning. Technical support is good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

99. Cross-curricular ICT is satisfactorily delivered in the school. The ICT manager has completed a useful audit of subject delivery and is working to develop this provision further. In the coming year he has been given substantial time allocation to work with subject areas. Resources are presently adequate to service the demands of a number of subjects, and the school has firm plans to work towards further improving the situation. There is good teaching of ICT in a number of subjects.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work are above average, with most pupils showing care for their work.
- Results in GCSE and A level examinations are very high.
- Teaching is very good, with teachers having high expectations and demanding high standards.
- Leadership is excellent. The head of department has a clear vision, provides detailed and helpful guidance and is developing a strong professional team.

Commentary

100. This is a very good department that provides well-organised opportunities for pupils to develop their geographical skills from Year 7 right the way through to Year 13. Pupils arrive in Year 7 with a range of geographical experiences, and because of the very good teaching their achievement by the end of Year 9 is good. The standard of work is above average.
101. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have a good sense of place: they described residential areas of Swindon in detail and showed good understanding of the Amazon rain forest. The Year 9 work on Japan is particularly exciting and full of flavour. A significant proportion of pupils do not have well developed map-reading skills. Coursework in Years 10 and 11 is good, and there are examples of high standards, where pupils demonstrate their ability to carry out a geographical investigation and reach appropriate conclusions.
102. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. There was very little difference between boys and girls, but the number of boys obtaining grades A* to C were high compared with the national average. The proportion of high grades achieved by girls was well above average. However, there was also some underachievement, especially amongst girls.
103. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. There is some imaginative teaching that motivates pupils and helps them to learn. The Year 10 lesson on shantytowns was an example of a carefully planned lesson that was demanding, interesting and captured the attention of pupils, because the teacher had a good understanding of how they learn. In the majority of lessons, pupils behave well and concentrate well, because teachers have high expectations. This helps pupils to learn, because they see good pieces of work and receive clear encouragement. The assessment of work is good, and pupils understand what is required and how to achieve higher standards. The Year 9 lesson on global warming used exemplars from previous years that established a good standard of work. Pupils' needs are well catered for, because teachers are sympathetic and provide good support. However, there is too little in-class support considering that most of the groups are mixed ability. Although pupils make some use of ICT to extend their learning, there are too few opportunities in lessons for pupils to make full use of modern technology, and the use of data logging in weather studies is not sufficiently established. The department makes very good use of fieldwork, and pupils learn how to enquire and are beginning to ask geographical questions. Teachers make a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills, and this results in good quality written work. They have also introduced 'thinking skills' into the curriculum, and this is having a beneficial effect. Pupils make good use of mind maps to reinforce their learning.
104. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. There is a very thorough analysis of the department's strengths and weaknesses, and realistic action points are established that help to bring about continual improvement. The team approach is very positive. Teachers carry out their own action research and have considered their own criteria for quality teaching in geography. This professional approach has achieved good improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average.
- The achievement of those pupils who completed the full-course GCSE was very good.
- Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average.
- Teaching is consistently very good, with some outstanding lessons.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.

Commentary

105. Pupils consistently produce work of a good standard. Their books and assignments show thoughtful work and interested pupils. The books of most Year 7 pupils are first rate, showing clarity of thought, enquiring minds and a growing awareness of themselves and other people. Pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of a variety of beliefs and their impact on people's lives. They learn to discuss and consider different opinions and attitudes. Most do this in a mature way: for example, pupils of different faiths in Year 7 became engaged in a high-level discussion on creation and the nature of responsibility. 'We never agree!', they concluded with a smile.
106. Pupils in Year 10 all take a short-course GCSE, and a significant number elect to continue their studies into Year 11 and achieve a full GCSE grade. The results of those taking the full course in 2003, largely girls, were well above the national average, although not so high a proportion achieved the higher grades. Nevertheless, their progress was very good. Pupils in Year 11 take a six-week course in alternative religions.
107. The high standards and good GCSE grades are the result of a consistently high standard of teaching and learning. Highly professional young teachers relate well to the pupils and provide exciting and stimulating lessons. This creates a caring and purposeful learning environment, leading to good achievement. A Year 9 lesson provided pupils with an opportunity to consider the idea of heaven and hell in a quiet and imaginative way. The use of music and video clips provided a spiritual experience for all in the room. In Years 10 and 11, pupils were able to discuss controversial moral and social issues in a supportive and helpful way. A Year 10 lesson used role-play to raise the issues of teenage pregnancy and abortion, not easy with only two boys in the group, but the pupils were sensible, caring and tolerant. Pupils' respectful approach to each other develops because of the high expectations and good role models set by the teachers. Increasingly, pupils are involved in self-assessment and they know how to improve their work.
108. The use of ICT to help pupils learn is mainly dependent on pupils working at home, but their skills of word processing and the use of clip art are good. Religious education lessons make a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, although this is not clearly identified in lesson plans.
109. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has not been in the post long, but has had a good impact and has a strong and effective team.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above national levels.
- Pupils make good progress.
- The teaching of history is good, with some very good features. This leads to good learning.
- History is well led and managed satisfactorily.
- Pupils do not have sufficient access to ICT to enhance their learning.
- The department has not yet sufficiently refined its assessment procedures to include, as standard practice, ongoing in-class assessment.
- Pupils do not have sufficient grasp of techniques to retain and recall facts for examinations.

Commentary

110. At the end of Year 9, standards are above national levels. Pupils develop a wide range of subject skills, including interpreting evidence, prioritising historical issues and understanding chronology. Higher-attaining pupils use their knowledge and understanding to identify, evaluate and use sources of information critically to analyse relationships between features of a particular period. For example, in their studies of the conditions in the trenches during the First World War, Year 9 pupils critically used photographs and films to understand more deeply, and more poignantly, life in the trenches for the ordinary soldier, irrespective of nationality. However, overall attainment, both across time and in examinations, is hampered by lack of retention skills, weak examination techniques and lack of wider and deeper reading.
111. At GCSE, pupils' results in 2003 were disappointing and below national averages. The head of department has carried out a thorough investigation of the results and has identified a number of areas for improvement, which include organising new schemes of work to meet the specifications of the new examination. Standards in class seen during the inspection are, however, in line with national averages. Pupils develop their analytical skills effectively and the higher-attaining pupils demonstrate a high degree of sophistication in their interpretation of historical polemics. For example, Year 11 pupils studying the Korean War discussed whether action by the American government was containment of, or aggression against, the North Koreans.
112. Pupils across all ability levels make good progress and achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Boys and girls achieve equally well, although boys are better at oral work than girls, whose written work is better presented. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in line with other pupils, because their teachers know them well, use good differentiated materials, and provide effective guidance in lessons. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress. However, there are areas of their learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11, such as wider and deeper reading and examination techniques, where pupils are not always fully challenged.
113. Teaching is good overall, is sometimes very good and was excellent in one lesson. A similarly strong profile of teaching applies to all years. Teachers know their subject well. They have an obvious love for it and this commitment is strongly communicated to pupils, providing a firm basis for learning. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide range of methods that support learning well. There is appropriate emphasis on literacy and high profiles are set for reading and for the use of correct technical language. Writing, however, particularly in examination conditions, is still a relative weakness for most pupils. Homework is set regularly and marking is well focused, supporting progress, learning and achievement. The lack of interactive whiteboards in the classrooms and limited access to ICT hamper the use of additional teaching methods and strategies to enhance independent learning skills.
114. Learning is good. Good relationships underpin learning, because pupils listen intently to each other and work well together in all years. Pupils behave well, with high concentration and focus.
115. Leadership is good. The head of history is also head of the faculty of humanities. The faculty leads and trials many new initiatives in the school, including the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Foundation Strand. Based on these, the head of department has formulated a clear vision for the future of history, which incorporates accelerated learning strategies and assessment for learning strategies. In these, he is supported particularly effectively by the senior management of the school and by his colleagues, whom he, in turn, supports. The head of department and his colleagues are very good role models of commitment to the maintenance of the highest standards.
116. Management is satisfactory. Much of the vision and the plans for improvement are not yet sufficiently embedded in the day-to-day management of the department. This is particularly

true of the monitoring and moderating of the formal assessment of pupils' work. Moreover, the use of ongoing in-class assessment to monitor and evaluate pupils' learning and achievement within individual lessons is still underdeveloped.

117. There has been good improvement in several areas, but overall the improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and management have contributed to good improvements since the last inspection.
- Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good.
- Good assessment procedures provide an accurate picture of pupils' attainment.
- Pupils' achievement is good.
- Boys do not achieve as well as girls.
- The curriculum for resistant materials does not provide sufficient continuity in content and challenge.
- The attitudes and behaviour of a minority of pupils hinders learning for themselves and others.

Commentary

118. Teacher assessments for pupils in Year 9 are average. Inspection observations indicate that current Year 9 pupils are attaining at a higher level than this. Since pupils enter the school with average attainment in design and technology, this represents good achievement. Higher-attaining pupils are able to develop a range of design ideas and record them with good three-dimensional sketching. The use of unlined sketchbooks allows pupils the freedom to draw, annotate and add research material from various sources, including the Internet. Sketchbooks show that higher-attaining pupils understand design methods and are able to write detailed evaluations of their work. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are able to respond to each aspect of designing and making, because courses are well structured and materials are adapted to suit them. Low literacy skills prevent some pupils from annotating research sketches in a clear and concise way.
119. GCSE results in 2003 were average. Results have shown a slight upward trend in the last three years, but comparative figures show that pupils do less well in technology than in some other subjects. Boys do not perform as well as girls. The school has recognised this and has begun to implement remedial strategies. Poor performance by boys was a key factor in below-average resistant materials results. Results were above average in food technology, and in textiles and graphics they were average. Standards for current Year 11 pupils overall are above average. In work and lessons seen, standards largely reflected examination results. In food technology, higher-attaining pupils have a good understanding of, for example, the range, countries of origin and nutritional values of fresh vegetables. Project folders contain good research and analysis drawn from a variety of sources, and pupils can use good graphic techniques to present their work. Higher-attaining pupils in resistant materials and graphics can use sophisticated computer software and combine this with good hand-drawn graphics to express their design ideas. However, a minority of pupils find it difficult to work independently and do not provide the individual effort needed to reach higher standards. Standards in resistant materials are not high enough. Pupils with special needs benefit from the practical nature of the work, and develop good personal organisation skills when, for example, planning and preparing a dish in food technology. Overall progress at this stage continues to be good and pupils achieve well.

120. Teaching overall is good, and sometimes very good. Some teaching is satisfactory and a small amount is unsatisfactory. Good and very good teaching fosters good relationships with pupils and creates a positive learning atmosphere. For example, in a very well-taught Year 10 food technology lesson, very good management of the working situation combined with pupils' good personal organisation skills enabled all pupils to prepare a bread recipe based on research into other cultures. Gifted and talented pupils in the group were able to extend their learning. Where teaching is only satisfactory, it does not seek to employ innovative ways to communicate knowledge of the subject. Some theory work in resistant materials, for example, consists of copied notes that are dated in content. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was characterised by a breakdown in mutual confidence between teacher and pupils, leading to a negative learning atmosphere and uncomfortable relationships. Teaching is monitored, but strategies for modifying the behaviour of a minority of pupils have yet to make an impact on some pupils who are not engaged constructively with their own learning. The majority of pupils, who behave well and co-operate with teachers and each other, enjoy a positive and constructive learning experience.
121. The recently appointed head of department provides very good leadership and has a clear vision for developing the subject within a technology college setting, and utilising the very good facilities to create a forward-looking technology department. Good management has brought about many significant changes in a short time. Schemes of work and assessment systems have been revised and linked to National Curriculum programmes of study. Newly qualified teachers and student teachers are given good support and there is now a more stable staffing situation. Good procedures have been set up for monitoring pupils' progress and the quality of teaching but, as yet, these have not had time to make a consistent impact across all areas of the department. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 provides a wide and worthwhile technology experience. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, however, do not have the option to continue with electronics or systems and control, or to follow a range of courses with a more vocational content. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment are above average in all year groups.
- Pupils learn well because they are taught well.
- The accommodation is very good.
- Provision for pupils' personal development is good.
- There are insufficient computers to support learning.

Commentary

122. Standards of attainment by pupils at the end of Year 9, in work seen during the inspection, were similar to teachers' assessments, and above the nationally expected level. Results in the GCSE examination in music in 2004 were well above the national average for the subject. During the inspection, similar standards of attainment were seen.
123. Overall, pupils' achievement at all stages is good, although girls' achievement is better than that of boys, because they pay greater attention to detail. Most pupils' attainment is close to the nationally expected level when they enter the school. They make rapid progress in Year 7 in composing and ensemble work. Higher-attaining pupils, many of whom play an instrument, learn to improvise and to experiment with a variety of musical elements in their compositions. By the end of Year 9, pupils are able to read staff notation, play melodic lines in keyboards and

classroom instruments, and devise instrumental arrangements. In Year 11, most pupils perform accurately but with limited interpretation, whereas higher-attaining pupils play confidently and stylishly. Pupils' compositions are properly structured, their ideas are logically developed, and their aural skills and general musical knowledge are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in music: younger pupils learn to contribute their own ideas and to co-operate in group work, and at GCSE those with special needs perform demanding repertoire fluently.

124. The quality of teaching is good across all years, with a number of very good features. Singing is particularly well taught, and so pupils develop a secure technique and enjoy the activity. Teachers are well qualified, and by skilful use of their instrumental and vocal abilities provide energetic role models. They have high expectations, and plan lessons with clear learning objectives, which ensure that pupils' essential musical skills are systematically developed. Tasks are stimulating and suitably challenging. Extension work stretches more able musicians, but some lower-attaining pupils have difficulty in keeping up with the pace set for the majority. Pupils learn to follow guidelines and develop independence by working in small groups in separate practice rooms. This permits them to develop critical judgement in refining their work.
125. Leadership and management are good. The recently qualified second member of staff is well supported, and work is properly monitored. Pupils' work is well marked, with extensive comment, and assessment takes place regularly, although the assessment system itself is time-consuming for the large numbers involved. The very good links with primary schools will be further strengthened by the presentation currently being devised by Year 9 pupils as part of the performing arts option of the school's innovative 'Curriculum Plus' programme. The accommodation, which was previously unsatisfactory, is now very good. However, two practice rooms are too small for group work, and storage is not well organised. Classroom resources have also improved considerably since the previous inspection, but there are still too few computers to permit the National Curriculum to be taught in full, and to support composing at GCSE.
126. Members of staff give a great deal of their time and expertise to rehearsing practical work with candidates in AS level, A level, GCSE and external examinations. Concerts take place regularly, and there are trips to professional events. The department contributes effectively to pupils' social, moral and cultural development, but opportunities for supporting pupils' spiritual development are often missed.
127. Good standards are being maintained, and improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are excellent, and pupils' achievement is excellent as a result.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Standards in Year 11 are very high.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal and cultural development.

Commentary

128. In Year 9, standards are well-above average. Pupils' achievement is very good, and they make very good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding in this subject. Their sketchbooks are lively and vigorous, and they experiment freely with a very wide range of materials. They use paint and charcoal to investigate fossils, developing their ideas into impressive large textural studies. Their collage work is very bright and lively, and they use metallic paper to create

decorative effects. They also work very confidently in three dimensions, producing masks based on a study of Native American art, and lively figure sculptures informed by the work of Giacommetti. These capture the liveliness of the human figure in motion: running, jumping and walking.

129. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were very high, and have been at this level for the last three years. In Year 11, standards are very high. Pupils' achievement is excellent. Their sketchbooks continue to be strong, becoming even more vigorous, and are used to drive forward pupils' ideas with bold experiments. Their observation work becomes more confident, and they accurately record the forms and textures seen in complex still-life groups. Wire sculptures based on birds are of a very high standard, and are very lively and humorous. Pupils also make very impressive sculptures based on pop art, creating huge chocolate bars and crumpled soft-drink containers.
130. Teaching and learning are excellent. Materials are used very vigorously, and pupils are encouraged to experiment freely and boldly with paint, card, wire and paper. Teachers also have excellent knowledge of the subject, and very high expectations. For example, in a lesson on mask making, the teacher gave very detailed demonstrations of how to cut and fold card to achieve hard or soft edges, and pupils responded very well, watching intently. They quickly got down to their work, cutting and scoring card, using wire and glue and tissue. They worked very effectively in pairs to build up exaggerated features on their masks. There was a sense of real excitement as the masks began to take shape, and pupils became inspired by the ideas. Excellent learning was the result.
131. Leadership and management are excellent. Standards in Year 11 are very high, and there is a shared commitment to the pursuit of high standards in the work of the department. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards and results have risen considerably, the strong focus on raising standards has been successful. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal and cultural development, by introducing them to the world of art in an exciting and vigorous way, and by encouraging them to look around them and appreciate the beauty of the natural world. They also study the art of other cultures, visit art galleries and learn to sketch and draw outdoors.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is good.
- Standards at GCSE are now good and have steadily improved.
- The curriculum is a major strength, offering breadth and depth, as well as an enrichment programme which is very popular in Years 8 and 9.
- Pupils are not currently being assessed on entry.
- Group sizes in Year 11 are too big, and this undermines teaching and learning.

Commentary

132. Standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 are generally good, compared with age-related expectations, in a range of games, dance, swimming, gymnastics and aspects of outdoor and adventurous activities. Pupils exhibit a range of skills in badminton and hockey, often accompanied by technical accuracy. While some lack controlled execution, others are at an advanced stage and perform confidently in a game context. In gymnastics, pupils show a range of sequences and a small number perform quite complex routines with poise and control. All pupils move apparatus and equipment safely and efficiently. In dance, the majority of girls are attaining well. A significant number show very high standards of fluency and clarity in their gesture as a direct result of the enrichment programme in Years 8 and 9.

Achievement across Years 7 to 9 for pupils as a whole is good where units of work allow pupils to pursue an activity to some depth. Most groups are developing the ability to make informed evaluations of their own and others' performances, as a result of the focus on this skill. For example, in a hockey lesson many pupils were able to adjust tactics appropriately in response to different game scenarios proposed by the teacher.

133. Standards in core physical education by Year 11 are satisfactory, with many pupils achieving well in a range of games, trampolining and orienteering. Some individuals, mostly GCSE candidates, show higher levels of performance in hockey and badminton. Across Years 10 and 11, achievement in core physical education is sometimes inhibited by large group sizes. Groups are often well in excess of thirty in football, basketball and badminton. This leads to minimal time on court and, in some large groups of boys, leads to poor behaviour from disaffected individuals who require constant attention. Pupils' ability to officiate is under-developed. Too many pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not meet the National Curriculum aspiration of two hours of physical activity each week.
134. At GCSE, all pupils achieve well, with a good number gaining A* to C grades last year. Results for the most recent cohort were above national averages, and there has been a steady improvement over the last two years. Attainment in theory lessons is good, with many pupils showing a good knowledge and understanding of the factors affecting performance and the issues surrounding the development of sporting facilities.
135. Achievement and endeavour across Years 7 to 11 is good. The incidence of non-participation is minimal. A significant number of boys and girls develop and refine their skills in the strong extra-curricular sports programme. Rich opportunities are provided for a large number of pupils to engage in internal or external school competition. Many clubs also exist for those pupils who wish purely to participate, and these are well attended.
136. Teaching is generally good, with some of it very good or excellent. Across Years 7 to 9, teaching is very good where there are challenging objectives and teachers provide stimulating demonstration and planned progression at a brisk pace, covering a variety of tasks. The opportunity for pupils to evaluate performance is evident in most lessons and it is well structured. In Year 9, excellent teaching was seen when girls were challenged to create a dance sequence involving chairs. A clear structure was given for the sequence and the teacher, who was able to demonstrate the difference between movement, pause and moments of stillness, inspired pupils. The opportunity to spectate and evaluate other pupils' work also provided a healthy sharing of ideas. Across Years 7 to 11, learning of practical skills is good, but there are missed opportunities to draw attention to, and underpin, the wider aspects of literacy and numeracy. Distinctive features of the teaching are good knowledge of the subject and the healthy balance of individual, small-group and whole-class activity. Teachers are good role models.
137. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a reflective culture, and the desire of the teaching team to pursue excellence but marry this with a 'sport for all' ethos means that overall provision for sport in the school is very good. After a period of some upheaval, the team are making very good use of the new facilities. The curriculum in Years 8 and 9 enriches the experience of many pupils and offers opportunities well beyond the minimum National Curriculum requirements. The policy of setting by games and the establishment of an in-depth programme are extending pupils. The number of pupils selecting physical education at GCSE is steadily increasing, and the increase in girls opting for this course and the proposed GCSE dance option is a significant development. The use of assessment is limited, and no baseline assessment on entry is available to monitor progress. Overall improvement in the subject since the last inspection is very good, and the move to the new site has enhanced opportunities for quality physical education and sport.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are very good opportunities for active citizenship.
- A good curriculum is made explicit in some subjects.
- Assessment practice is good.
- Not all subjects explicitly identify citizenship

Commentary

138. Standards are above average due to the successful implementation of citizenship across some subjects, the personal, social and health education programme and tutorial time. Pupils in Year 8 history were seen completing part of a module clearly identified as part of the citizenship programme regarding the importance of achieving the vote. Written and display work seen by Years 8 and 11 in their personal, social and health education show very good understanding of environmental issues, such as deforestation, and aspects of the English legal system.
139. Achievement across the school is good. All three strands of the subject are developing well to support pupils' knowledge, enquiry skills and active participation. There is a regularly maintained noticeboard for competitions which is dedicated to issues arising, for example, from the media and the environment and judged for effectiveness by Year 10 pupils. The school used the local authority's Youth Democracy Day to enable some ten Year 10 pupils to debate policies in the local chamber. There is good provision for active charitable works through the Harvest Festival, parcels for the local elderly and for people in need in Kenya.
140. Teaching and learning are good. This is due to the overall good teaching in the personal, social and health education programme, where pupils are able to actively research topics; the tutorial programme, which helps to support the assessment practice; and the explicit teaching of active citizenship, as seen in a Year 8 lesson. Pupils had constructed monuments to those who lost their lives in the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and wore sashes, made by themselves and worn with great dignity, throughout a lesson on the importance of the vote in a democracy. The Anti-Racism Football Week of Action in Years 7 to 9 has also contributed very effectively to raising pupils' understanding of specific responses to incidents of racism in a high-profile area.
141. Leadership and management are very good. There is a very clear scheme of work which has followed a full audit of citizenship requirements and has secured the commitment of some subjects, for example geography, history and religious education, and input into the programme for personal, social and health education. Assessment through established modules reaches form tutors in a well-organised arrangement.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection 10 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 2003.

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
English Language	14	100	94	35.7	36.3	81.4	80.9
English Literature	17	100	99.5	23.5	46.5	76.5	86.5
Mathematics	21	100	96.7	66.7	55.6	98.1	88.8
Chemistry	9	100	97.6	33.3	49.0	80.0	84.9
Geography	23	100	98.7	60.9	44.5	91.3	84
Psychology (AS level)	35	100	N/A	40	N/A	N/A	N/A
Art AVCE	10	100	92.1	40	39	88	70.2
Economics and Business	19	100	N/A	63	N/A	N/A	N/A
DT (Product Design)	10	100	97.8	70	35	96	77.9
Sports Studies	9	100	98.0	44.4	30.9	75.6	75.2
French	3	100	98.8	66.7	51.5	100	87.6

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

One lesson in English literature was sampled. Standards are above average and students' achievement is good, because teaching is very good and students are independent thinkers with very positive attitudes to learning.

English language

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is very good; knowledge of the subject is excellent.
- Students show great interest and involvement in their work.
- Very good assessment procedures underpin the learning.
- The department is very well led and managed

Commentary

142. A level results were above average in 2002 and 2003. Many students achieved the highest grades, and all achieved grades A to E.
143. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm that standards are above average. At present, no boys are studying for A2 in English, but several are following the course at AS level, and are achieving as well as the girls. Achievement is good. Most students attain and several exceed the targets set for them by the school. They gain in confidence in expressing their ideas, both verbally and on paper. Technical vocabulary is also used more confidently and fluently as the course progresses, aided by the constant use of linguistic terminology by teachers.

144. Students are independent thinkers, able to discuss on equal terms with the teachers by Year 13. They are knowledgeable about current research, provided for them to read in abundance by teachers and found for themselves on the Internet. Writing is well structured and students have ample opportunities to practise under pressure of time, as well as to write at length, for example, in their personal studies. Higher-attaining students produce incisive analyses of language, showing sophisticated understanding of linguistic concepts. Lower-attaining students demonstrate reasonable control in their arguments and use technical vocabulary competently. These features are secure in Year 13 and developing well in Year 12. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students were able to see, helped by skilful questioning, how different newspaper reports of the same story were written in very different language, using different vocabulary and different syntax to create different tones.
145. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The positive and mature attitudes of the students contribute to the collegiate atmosphere in discussion. The excellent knowledge of the subject of the teachers shows in their enthusiasm in the delivery of the subject and in the high quality of their marking of written work. Very good progress was observed in a Year 13 lesson, when the teacher went through an essay on how the use of standard English is changing, looking in particular at how and where marks would be gained in an examination and how to gain the highest marks. Students know exactly what their strengths are and how to improve their work. Comments are closely linked to the assessment objectives of a particular module. Students work in a dedicated way, both in class and for homework. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson, students strove, eventually successfully, and with the help of excellent questioning from the teacher, to understand how syntax closely reflected the meaning in a passage about the First World War.
146. Leadership and management are very good. Responsibilities for delivering the different parts of the course are clear, and results are carefully monitored so that areas of relative weakness can be identified and improved. Management is continually seeking ways to improve the course. New specifications for examinations have been successfully introduced, and teachers are very knowledgeable about examination requirements. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with high standards maintained.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

147. Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are above average. Their research skills are also above average. The school runs a level 3 course in communication skills that is very well organised and successful. Students collate material from work covered in various subject areas, and teachers ensure that courses give students relevant opportunities. For example, in design and technology, students are given good opportunities for reporting to the whole group. Students who also need to take the examination to gain their qualifications do so with great success.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are good.
- Teachers speak French rapidly and continuously in lessons.
- Materials are up-to-date, relevant and interesting.
- Students' attitudes are very positive.
- Many students need to improve their speaking skills.
- Students are not required to log their independent reading and listening work.

Commentary

148. Because numbers of students taking French in recent years have been low, comparisons between A level results and national averages are unreliable. However, in 2003 and 2002 all the students passed, with five out of seven gaining an A or B grade. All achieved well to gain these results, which represented good progress from the students' performance at GCSE.
149. Standards in the current Year 13, where a larger number (seven students) are preparing for A level, are average overall. This is also good achievement when their GCSE grades are taken into account. The students' speaking skills are very varied, however, as was shown in a lesson where they discussed aspects of cloning. The highest-attaining expressed their ideas fluently and with a wide range of phrases and vocabulary. The less confident students, who were in the majority, used more restricted vocabulary, and needed and received much support from the teacher. Students' written work and vocabulary show a similar range of competence. However, all show considerable interest in the tasks they undertake.
150. Standards in Year 12 are also very varied. Several students have moved on well in all language skills from GCSE work. The lower-attaining students try hard to contribute to debate and discussion, and they have many opportunities to develop their speaking skills in paired work. However, these students lack the necessary confidence to express ideas and opinions fluently, confidence they would gain through more extensive contact with France.
151. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers speak French rapidly and vigorously to develop students' listening and speaking skills. They choose relevant, interesting and up-to-date materials and exploit them well. Students' writing is marked carefully, and students have a clear idea of how well they are doing. Teachers work very hard to give both the higher and lower-attaining students the maximum amount of support and challenge. However, teachers do not require the students to keep a log of their independent listening and reading work, nor to redraft their work fully once it is carefully marked.
152. Leadership and management are good overall. The students receive helpful extra support in speaking from a language assistant, and almost all took part in a study trip to France. Students use the Internet freely to support their learning.

MATHEMATICS

The school offers courses leading to mathematics at AS and A level. The students study a combination of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. There are resit GCSE courses for those studying other subjects in the sixth form who did not achieve a grade C in mathematics in Year 11. A small number of students each year choose to take further mathematics at AS and A2 level.

Lessons were seen and work scrutinised for students on the AS and A2 level courses, and a sample of students interviewed to gain their views of the provision made for them. The main focus of the inspection was on AS and A2 level work in mathematics.

There are five students studying further mathematics. They are very well taught and achieve very well. All are on course to gain a grade A. Results year on year are well above the national average. The students' achievement reflects their prior attainment and ability.

A dozen students chose to retake GCSE at the beginning of the academic year. Half of these have achieved a grade C in the autumn set of examinations. Half of the rest are preparing for next summer's examinations, with good prospects of success. The remainder, who began with lower grades gained from following the foundation GCSE course in Year 11, are working towards taking the intermediate paper next autumn.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good, so that the students gain very good examination results.
- The students are good independent learners; hence they achieve very well.
- The students enjoy the challenge of mathematics; their attitudes to their work and the teaching are very positive.

Commentary

153. A level results in 2003 were well above the national average, following well above-average results in all recent years. Pupils usually perform better in mathematics at A2 level than they do in other A level subjects. There is no significant difference between the results of boys and girls. The results compare favourably overall with what might be predicted from the students' performance in the GCSE examinations they took two years before. AS level results present a similar picture, with attainment well above that seen nationally.
154. Very few students choose to study advanced mathematics courses in the sixth form who have studied the intermediate rather than the higher level paper for GCSE or who have not gained the highest grades of A or A*. Those students who are not at this standard at the beginning of the course are offered enhanced induction arrangements, in the shape of extra tuition and work to do. All take advantage of this offer, so very few students fail to complete the A level and AS courses successfully, once they have embarked upon them.
155. The standard of work seen was well above national norms, as one might expect from the examination results. All students showed good understanding and knowledge of differential and integral calculus, at various levels of complexity. Statistical concepts are well understood and exemplified in very good coursework, such as that analysing the age of cars in Wootton Bassett. In mechanics, students handle problems on projectiles well and solve problems involving Newton's laws of motion readily.
156. Year 13 students have a very good grasp of how to use vector methods to find the intersection of line and plane in three-dimensional geometry. Year 12 students range in attainment from those who are having to work hard to achieve above a pass grade, to those who are likely to achieve a grade A.
157. The highest-attaining students are very well provided for. They achieve well in the national challenge competitions for senior pupils, and are taught and entered for the advanced extension award papers. Results in these and in the sixth term examination papers (STEP) for university entrance have always been very successful.
158. Teaching is very good throughout, so that the students are improving their understanding of the various aspects of mathematics very well. Lessons are carefully prepared and well presented, providing the right level of pace and challenge. The teachers are all experienced and well qualified. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection. One or two occasions were observed when using an overhead projector or interactive whiteboard would have been preferable to sketching shapes by hand. Nevertheless, for the most part, effective use is made of information technology, including the interactive whiteboards in two of the mathematics classrooms. An example was a Year 13 lesson on vectors, in which the students were referred to useful websites on the Internet. Skilful use of discussion and question and answer techniques ensures that students understand. Teachers cross-reference and compare topics for study with real-life situations in statistics and mechanics, thus enlivening lessons so that the students take pleasure in their work and find it interesting. An example of this was an experiment with the equivalent of a bungee, made up by Year 13 students to test their hypotheses of what happens when one jumps from a high bridge attached only by a strong elastic rope.
159. Assessment is very good. Students are required to do short-term, timed tests, marked to examination standards, and so appreciate the importance of answering under pressure. Any

areas of study where the students are in difficulty are checked through and marked in class, with very good support from the teachers. The department's aim to encourage the students to become independent learners is realised, in that they are encouraged to annotate and correct answers carefully and make full corrections where they are needed. This results in them being able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses very well, and hence remedy any problem areas.

160. The students, when interviewed, spoke warmly of their teachers and of how much they enjoyed their mathematics, inspired at least in part by their teachers' enthusiasm and love for their subject. The students feel that their teachers support them well. They feel free to approach them when they are in difficulties.
161. The mathematics department is very well led and managed. The teachers are enthusiastic and pull together as a team. A reflection of the teachers' commitment is that they give their time very generously outside of lessons – at break, lunchtime and after school – to provide extra tuition whenever students ask it of them. Improvement since the time of the previous inspection is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

162. In general, the students' skills in mathematics are well developed, and there was no evidence to suggest that their academic progress is limited because of difficulty with numerical or graphical concepts. In business studies, students use critical path analysis to support arguments in economic theory; in ICT and geography, students make extensive use of statistical and graphical techniques.
163. There is no offer of a key skills course in mathematics for students across the curriculum as a whole, but students taking A level mathematics are able to extend their studies to gain further accreditation in the application of number at level 3. For this they produce a portfolio of work, including a combination of statistical coursework and a project in mechanics. All entered are successful in obtaining this accreditation.

SCIENCE

The focus subject was chemistry. Biology, physics and AVCE health and social care were sampled. Lessons were observed and students' files were examined. In 2003, results in biology were above the national average, with more girls achieving the higher grades (A or B) than boys. Standards in biology are very good. In 2003, results in physics were in line with national averages, although only one student achieved a higher grade out of a cohort of seven boys. Standards in physics are satisfactory. The teaching in biology is at least satisfactory, sometimes good; however, the teaching in physics is variable.

The vocational course (AVCE) in health and social care is beginning to attract increasing numbers and standards in the subject are satisfactory. Teaching and learning in the subject are good.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are in line with the national average for this subject.
- Teaching overall is satisfactory.
- Teachers know their students well and are able to teach in a manner that addresses their weaknesses.
- Students have a positive attitude to learning and sustain effort in lessons.

- Marking and assessment do not sufficiently support the development of students' learning.
- Use of ICT to support learning is insufficiently developed.

Commentary

164. Over the last three years, no student has failed A level chemistry. Although the number of higher grades (A or B) in 2003 was slightly below the national average, overall results were close to the national figures, although comparisons are difficult due to small cohort sizes. Observation of lessons and review of students' files and coursework confirm that this standard is being maintained with current groups. The Year 13 students work hard and are building on the satisfactory standards they achieved in Year 12.
165. Results in AS level in 2003 were in line with the national average, and over the last three years only one student has failed the examination. The current Year 12 students are beginning to develop confidence and are working at a standard that should ensure that all achieve a pass grade at the end of the year. The standards reached at both A level and AS level show that achievement is satisfactory.
166. In the lessons observed during the inspection, teaching and learning were always at least satisfactory and sometimes very good. Teachers know their students well and are able to take advantage of relatively small class sizes to ensure that attention is given to individual weaknesses and to develop student confidence with the subject matter. Consequently, relationships between teachers and students are good, and contribute to a positive learning atmosphere during lessons. In Year 13, students are able to plan and carry out experiments to identify orders of reactivity, and do so in a manner that gives due attention to safety aspects and requires the minimum of teacher supervision. In Year 12, students are developing confidence with mathematical manipulations to identify energy changes.
167. Lessons for both year groups are characterised by a sense of purpose, but sometimes lack pace, particularly in Year 12, where students are at a point in their learning where they should be able to handle calculations with greater speed.
168. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The course is structured and administered in a manner that enables students to achieve to their potential. The two chemistry teachers share modules of work and review progress as they progress through topics. However, the use of marking and assessment does not sufficiently support students' own understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Coursework is assessed correctly, but does not have enough detailed comments to allow students to understand what they must do to improve next time.
169. The department has access to data-logging sensors and there is some use of ICT, but as yet it is not developed to the point where it is a regular feature of students' learning. This aspect of the provision for chemistry is unsatisfactory.
170. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The provision of ICT in the sixth form is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good leadership.
- Standards are above average.
- There are good resources for ICT in the sixth form, enhanced by support materials on the school's Intranet.

Commentary

171. Results in the 2003 examinations were above the national averages. These standards are reflected in an analysis of coursework as well as in classroom observations of Year 13 students. Achievement of students is good.
172. Year 13 students choose a good variety of projects to pursue, ranging from an electronic sports goods catalogue to a plants database for a garden centre. They tackle these problems well, applying good analytical skills to develop detailed and comprehensive specifications. They consider end-users' needs in depth. Their strategies for testing their software solutions are good and they evaluate their projects well. Students have good command of the software they use.
173. Year 12 students produce good designs for systems and annotate the progress of their work clearly and concisely. These annotations show that they have a good grasp of what can be improved in their work. They are making good progress in acquiring the areas of knowledge and understanding set out in the syllabus.
174. Teaching is good. Teachers have a good command of the subject and this is evident in the quality of the feedback they give students and in their detailed planning. Teachers plan lessons well, so that they have a variety of activity and pace that engages students' interest very well. Teachers make very good use of the interactive whiteboard to stimulate learning, as well as providing object lessons in the power of ICT to enhance communication. Assessment procedures are very good, and regular progress reviews ensure that students stay well on track. Students' attitudes to learning are very good and lessons are purposeful and productive.
175. Leadership and management of ICT in the sixth form are very good. The ICT manager has created a very good team to deliver the good range of courses that are offered. To support teaching and learning, he has developed a very good set of resources on the school's Intranet. These are well used by students.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

176. There is sound provision of ICT resources for the sixth form, although not all students have good access to them. Students on some GNVQ courses that require all coursework to be completed using ICT have difficulty finding free machines at the times they need them. There are good examples of students using ICT to present their work well and of subjects using ICT as a tool to aid learning. However, a number of subjects have not made good progress in this area.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' results at AS and A level were very high in 2003.
- The standards of work seen during the inspection were very good, because of the attitudes of students.
- The teaching is very good, because teachers are very experienced, enthusiastic and challenging.
- The head of department provides clear guidance and has a realistic vision for the development of the subject.

- There are very good fieldwork opportunities.
- Students have to rely too much on their own computing facilities to extend their learning.

Commentary

177. Geography is a very successful subject in the sixth form, with a high take up in Year 12 and Year 13, due to the good results and the very good teaching. In 2003, 29 students took AS level geography of whom 73 per cent achieved grades A and B, and 23 students took A level geography, of whom 60 per cent achieved grades A and B. These results are well above the national average. The achievement of students in both years is very good, because the work is well organised and their attitudes are very good.
178. Students in Year 12 participate in well-organised fieldwork in Portland, and have a good understanding of the processes contributing to coastal landforms. They are aware of the impact of human factors on the management of coastal environments. Year 13 students revising the evidence for climate change were most impressive, providing their own motivation and organisation and reinforcing their learning in a positive way. Students are able to understand models and apply these to specific locations. Year 13 students examining the core-periphery model showed their understanding when using data to apply the theory to development in Italy. In almost all cases they made very good use of case studies to add reality to the theory. Students' understanding of human geography is not quite as good as their understanding of physical processes; this is related to the nature of the work. A small proportion of students find the analytical work in the human examination quite demanding.
179. Teachers show a high level of commitment and their own enthusiasm is transmitted to students, several of whom go on to study geography at university each year. One of the main strengths of the department is the clear and detailed analysis and evaluation of the performance of each year's work. As a result, a list of action points highlights strengths and shows the way to further improvement. This is a department that is very ably led, has developed a strong team and inspires students. The attention to key skills is very important in helping students to develop their geographical skills and understanding. However, there are too few planned opportunities for students to use high-level ICT skills to extend their learning.

Religious education

180. The lack of religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory and means that the requirements of the agreed syllabus are not met. The number of students choosing to study religious education in the sixth form is also disappointingly low, but is improving. The groups are too small for any meaningful comparisons to be made, but in 2003 the average points score achieved by the two students was well above the national average.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology; product design

Provision for design and technology; product design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and leads to very good achievement for students.
- Leadership is very good and the course is well organised.
- Students' progress is tracked well.
- Students are clear about their attainment and progress.
- Lessons are taught with regard to personal as well as academic progress.

- Students use ICT and computer-aided design and manufacturing techniques well, but these skills are not yet integrated fully into coursework projects.

Commentary

181. A level results in 2003 were well above average, with two thirds of candidates attaining A and B grades. This was an improvement on the already high figure for the previous year. Comparative figures show that students' achievement is high. Current Year 13 students are working at above-average standards, in line with their predicted grades. Year 12 students have made good progress since beginning the course and, based on their modest grades at GCSE level, are achieving well.
182. Students in Year 13 are engaged in a range of well-chosen projects, which enable them to display good higher-order practical skills. Appropriate constructional techniques are used, and all projects arise from an analysis of a real design need. Students have good practical skills and are confident in the use of hand tools and machinery. Design folios contain research from a variety of sources, and the best ones combine hand-drawn graphics with computer-generated images. The high-quality computer graphics generated by one student created images that were beyond his capacity to manufacture, so his resulting practical work was heavily modified. A module of work based on computer-aided design and manufacturing has resulted in imaginative and high quality 'one-off' projects, but the skills have not been fully integrated into further individual project work. Year 12 students have produced well-written case studies based on design movements of the twentieth century, and supported these with PowerPoint presentations to the full group.
183. Teaching is very good overall. Teachers know the students well, assess their work thoroughly and provide good information on progress and achievement. Students respond with positive attitudes, which enable good working relationships to be established. In a very well taught lesson, for example, Year 12 and 13 students explored the concept of protecting intellectual property in a mature discussion. Students were made fully aware of the lesson objectives and given the opportunity to present their views to the whole group. Learning was good, because the teacher's input and students' response were rapidly followed by a range of reinforcement exercises. Lessons contain good opportunities for students to develop communication and teamwork skills. Only a few students intend to follow a design-related career in higher education, but all are very positive about the benefits of the course to them as individuals, as well as to their academic prospects.
184. Very good leadership and management of the subject has identified strengths and weaknesses and established a clear path for development within the framework of technology college status. For example, a proposed change of examination syllabus will enable teaching to be co-ordinated with a parallel course in textile design. The course has not attracted many female students, but female teachers in the department provide good role models. Computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment is limited in range but used to its full capacity.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

The A level course in art and design was sampled. Results in the 2003 A level examinations were well above average, and have been sustained at similar levels in recent years. Strengths of the teaching were seen in painting lessons, where materials and methods were vigorous and exciting, and tasks were challenging. For example, students painted over very roughly textured surfaces, using thick, bright paint to build up their compositions. Students rose to the challenges successfully, and created vibrant large-scale landscapes. Learning was excellent as a result.

Provision in art and design AVCE is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are excellent, and students' achievement is excellent as a result.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Materials and methods are active, vigorous and ambitious in scale.

Commentary

185. Results in the AVCE examination in 2003 were well above average and showed a significant improvement on those gained in 2002. The great majority of students who start the course complete it, and retention is good.
186. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average. Students' achievement is excellent considering their GCSE results when they begin the course in Year 12. Their three-dimensional work is imaginative, and large sculptures based on a study of natural forms are intricate, developing spiral forms from wire, woven rope and real seashells. Students' landscape painting is very strong, and they produce lively compositions, which use perspective in a dynamic way to draw the viewer into the picture surface. Students also work very vigorously on roughly textured surfaces, using thick paint and bright colours, balancing warm and cool colours and light and dark tones to create exciting abstract compositions. Their work from the life model is bold and adventurous, and they draw incisive lines in charcoal over smudged layers of chalk pastel. They also paint very impressive murals, which are ambitious in scale and highly decorative. To create these murals, students have to meet with clients, discuss their ideas and manage their budgets for materials. As a result, they show a very good grasp of the realities of professional practice.
187. Teaching and learning are excellent, and students' achievement is excellent as a result. Materials and methods are ambitious in scale, and vigorous and exciting. Teachers' expectations are very high, and they ask probing questions, challenging students to consider how their work could be improved. For example, in one lesson students were painting from photographs and sketches of landscape. The teacher insisted that they used broad and loose brushstrokes, and experiment with mark-making techniques, questioning them about the effects they were trying to achieve, and how they might achieve them. They were encouraged to be bold, and they began to work freely, dabbing and slashing with their brushes, learning new techniques intuitively through the rhythm of the work. Learning was excellent as a result. In addition, students have a very strong grasp of the assessment system, and they learn how to use it by assessing each other's work in much the same way as teachers and examiners do.
188. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a strong commitment to using materials vigorously and actively, and very high expectations are a consistent feature of lessons. The displays in the school and the everyday work of the department communicate a strong sense of vision and excitement. This has a powerful impact on students, who rise to challenges in their work, and whose achievement is excellent as a result. Although the course was not running at the time of the previous inspection, the marked improvement in results seen in 2003 has been maintained in the standards seen in the school, which are well above average.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A and AS level courses are available, as well as other enrichment opportunities through the complementary studies programme.
- A good percentage of students gained grades A or B at A level in the most recent cohort.
- No compulsory physical activity programme for all students is available at this level.

Commentary

189. Standards in the work of Year 12 and 13 students observed during the inspection are in line with expectations of student academic potential. In recent years, all students have been successful in gaining A to E grades, and an increasing number have been achieving grades A or B. Attainment at AS level shows an upward trend, and last year's results indicate that students are achieving beyond their targets. Students show appropriate knowledge and understanding of physiological and psychological factors affecting performance, and their ability to make links with previous learning is generally sound. In a Year 12 session, students were working on the topic of muscle actions and linking them with specific movements. With promptings from the teacher, they were able to make appropriate links to related aspects of sports performance. In Year 13, students took a positive approach to learning about the 'audience effect' and showed insight into the influences and features affecting sports performance. In both years, students endeavoured to draw on personal experience to relate theory to practical examples. Research skills of students are developing well, and most sessions have an element of testing that emphasises the need to present and understand findings. A significant number of students at this level take a mature and thoughtful approach to their work.
190. Achievement in AS and A level reflects the amount of independent work put in by individual students; those who rely exclusively on the teacher underachieve. The numbers of students taking the subject at this level have increased significantly. Much of the improvement in this area has been due to the improved consistency in the teaching team and the clear responsibilities delegated to individual members of staff. Year 12 students are making good progress on the Community Sports Leader Award course, which is one of the practical options available in the complementary studies programme; their achievement on this course enables them to analyse performance critically as group leaders and increases their ability to communicate and organise.
191. Teaching at this level is a major strength of the department and is very good overall. Teachers endeavour to provide a range of interesting tasks to engage students. Knowledge of the subject is very good and enables teachers to provide stimulating examples to illustrate their teaching. In the very good sessions, pace is maintained throughout and questions are directed at individuals, always encouraging the link between theory and practice. Lessons often start with students being put under pressure to recall previous learning. Teachers know their students and are able to direct questions appropriately in order to enhance learning and test their knowledge of the topic. Teachers' expectations of their students are often high, and demands are put on students to learn independently, in the form of either preparatory or follow-up work, which leads to students being able to present and disseminate relevant topics. Extension tasks are used to challenge the higher-attaining students. Targets are clear and are shared with students. All teachers show a genuine enthusiasm for their subject and endeavour to link scientific concepts to practical issues within sport, fitness and historical studies.

192. Leadership and management of the programme are very good. Responsibilities within the team are delegated well and teachers play to their strengths in the delivery of specific topics. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, which is reflected in improved grades and greater numbers of students selecting the subject. The Community Sports Leader Award is another important development.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching is resulting in very good learning.
- Every aspect of the department is led and managed very well.
- Results in the AS level examinations are above the national averages and show good achievement.
- Year 13 students are working at standards that are above the recent national averages for A level.
- Curricular arrangements, which necessitate some classes being held after the end of the normal school day, are placing students and their teacher under undue pressure.

Commentary

193. This subject is a recent addition to the sixth form curriculum and, to date, students have only been entered for AS level examinations. In 2003, 35 candidates took the examination, almost all passed and the proportion of higher grades (A or B) exceeded the national average. Comparison of this performance with attainment at GCSE demonstrates good achievement, which is shared by both male and female students.
194. A large number of these students (22) have continued on to A level. All the evidence gathered from observation of lessons and analyses of test results indicates that they are building on their success at AS level and achieving well. Year 13 students, covering a social psychology module, were able to give perceptive evaluations of pieces of research, showing their mastery of this high-level skill. If these standards are maintained, results in the 2004 A level examinations will exceed the likely national averages.
195. Thirty-seven Year 12 students are taking AS level, and all are making good progress. All are working at standards that should ensure a pass grade, and a significant proportion is consistently producing work at the level required for a higher grade. Students learning about the variety of theories that explain the development of gender-specific behaviour were able to discuss the issues, using a wide range of technical terminology with great confidence.
196. Teaching, which is founded on excellent mastery of the subject and the demands of the examination, is very good. All lessons are planned in great detail, and always include imaginative methods that encourage independent learning. Students are consistently being challenged to think out concepts for themselves, and subtle interventions by teachers ensure that learning is both accurate and secure. Relationships in lessons are excellent. Students' co-operation with each other aids learning enormously, and students respond to the respect with which teachers treat them with maturity and high levels of motivation. High-quality learning resources, many produced by the teachers, add much interest and help students to relate work to their own knowledge and experience. All these features were evident in a Year 13 lesson on the effect of the 'majority' on the tendency of human beings to conform. A simple experiment brought the topic alive, and students left the lesson with a real understanding of how group pressures operate.

197. Very good leadership and management are evident in the following ways:
- Teachers and students share a love for the subject, morale is high and all are focused on success.
 - The course guidance provided for students is of very high quality and helps them to maximise their performance.
 - The work of the two teachers who share responsibility for classes is very well co-ordinated. Cross-references are constantly included in lessons and ensure that students gain a coherent knowledge of the whole syllabus.
 - Assessment of attainment and progress is detailed and is used well to monitor the effectiveness of teaching. Any underperformance by students is quickly identified and effective advice on how to improve provided immediately.
 - The development of generic study skills is cleverly built into teaching. One outcome of this emphasis is unusually well organised and high-quality student files. Perhaps more significantly, these skills help students in all their sixth form studies, and will be invaluable to those going on to higher education.
198. The popularity of the subject has resulted in more students opting for this subject than can be accommodated within the main timetable. Some lessons are taught as 'twilight' sessions, which run for almost two hours after the end of the normal school day. Observation of one of these lessons found students and their teacher still going strong at 5.30 pm, with a good pace being maintained. Over time, this arrangement places a great demand on students, and more so on the teacher, who has already completed a full teaching load during the day. This is only acceptable as an interim solution. Further development of the subject requires rationalisation of the staffing provision.
199. The development of this new addition to the sixth form curriculum within the space of 18 months is remarkable. If the first set of A level results match expectations based on present performance, the school will have established an important and successful extension to the curriculum. Potential for further improvement is very good.

BUSINESS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards attained at A2 and AS level are well above those obtained in similar schools.
- Very good teaching is provided by a dedicated team.
- Added value is very good.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- A lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject impacts on students' performance in both class work and examinations.
- Lack of access to ICT, including interactive whiteboards, limits teaching and learning strategies.
- Vocational education is offered in the sixth form, but it does not yet address the needs of the lower-attaining students.
- Links with businesses are a relative weakness of the department.

Commentary

200. Results at A2 are well above figures for similar schools. The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are well above those seen in similar schools. Higher-attaining students evaluate evidence effectively, make reasoned judgements and present appropriate and well-supported conclusions. Lower-attaining students use a wide range of business terminology confidently. They demonstrate clear understanding of key

business concepts and are increasingly confident with the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data, although these still remain relative weaknesses.

201. Standards at AS level are well above national norms. Higher-attaining students apply relevant theory and show a good grasp of business concepts. However, they do not always develop an explanation into a fully substantiated view. Lower-attaining students often make assertions that are unsupported and they present evidence that is not always evaluated.
202. Standards in AVCE are in line with national figures overall, but this masks the very wide range of attainment in the cohort. The strength of the higher-attaining students' classwork is their basic understanding of the subject matter and the steady accumulation of knowledge, particularly of such underpinning business concepts as organisational functions and structures. Students' projects are interesting, well produced and professionally presented. Lower-attaining students struggle to meet the intellectual requirements of the course. Relative weaknesses are the interpretation and analysis of data and students' failure to retain knowledge and understanding over time.
203. Given the levels of prior attainment at entry to the sixth form, achievement at AS and A2 levels is very good. In AVCE, achievement is good. However, students' progress is hindered by their lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject, due to additional interests outside school that impact on the time they can devote to learning.
204. Teaching is very good. Teachers have excellent rapport with students, and their expert knowledge of the subject underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities, to allow students to apply and extend their learning. Students are very well supported academically. Teachers endeavour to ensure that students have enough practice in the kinds of analysis that will enable them to become more independent learners. Progress is best where students apply assessment and evaluation criteria to their work.
205. Learning reflects teaching. Students respond very well in lessons. Their attitudes are mature and they sustain interest. Higher-attaining students maintain intellectual rigour. However, some students are happy to be passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning. Students have very positive views of the subject. They particularly appreciate the very clear organisation and structure of their courses, and the clear feedback on their attainment and progress.
206. The department's sixth form curriculum is broad and balanced and offers opportunities for success for the higher-attaining pupils, but it does not yet cater sufficiently for the lower-attaining pupils. Resources are very good. Staffing is very good. Relatively new accommodation and ICT facilities aid learning; the students use computers very effectively to undertake research and to prepare reports for coursework. However, the lack of interactive whiteboards limits strategies for both teaching and learning. Insufficient use is made of links with local businesses, and it is regrettable that the department no longer engages in national and international visits to enhance students' learning.
207. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department checks and analyses results carefully to identify areas of courses in which learning can be improved, and sets clear targets for action as a consequence. He has a clear vision for the future of the department, which sensibly encompasses plans to strengthen the current strong academic and vocational aspects of the department's provision to meet the wide and differing needs and aspirations of future cohorts of students. In all of this, he is well supported by his colleagues, whom he in turn supports. He is an excellent role model for a department committed to the highest standards.
208. Business education in the sixth form was not reported in the previous inspection, but there is obvious evidence of good year-on-year improvement.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

209. The sixth form offers students a discrete key skills programme, an organised curriculum enhancement programme, a taught general studies course and other options. While students tend to focus their attention on their AS/A-level or AVCE subjects they benefit considerably from the quality and extent of additional provision. Key skills promotion focuses on communication skills and is most effectively organised so that all the subjects responsible for providing opportunities do so. The ASDAN Universities Award scheme is highly effective in building on students' existing interests and school and community service activities and it fosters new lines of personal development. The formalising of these activities ensures students pursue them with real commitment and the certification and award of UCAS points gives further status to the programme. General studies has long been given greater prominence than in many sixth forms. It is currently very well taught to a selection of students who reach well above average standards, but entry is being extended to include all students as of September 2004.
210. Collectively these programmes contribute very effectively to students' personal development, their impact on school and community life in general and their preparation for university entrance or work after the sixth form.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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