

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **CHELMSFORD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

Broomfield Road, Chelmsford

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115326

Headteacher: Mrs M Curtis

Lead inspector: Mr R Hancock

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 October 2003

Inspection number: 259201

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	849

School address:	Broomfield Road Chelmsford
Postcode:	CM1 1RW
Telephone number:	01245 352592
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Bebb

Date of previous inspection: 27 April 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Chelmsford County High School for Girls is a Foundation grammar school for students in the 11 to 18 age range. It has no well-defined or natural catchment area and students come not only from the town of Chelmsford but also from surrounding areas. The school has achieved both technology college and beacon school status. It has won a schools' achievement award for three consecutive years. The backgrounds of students are very mixed and include urban and rural but the majority are from relatively affluent homes. The attainment of students on entry to the school is very high. Virtually all students continue their education in the sixth form. There are very few students with special educational needs. About ten per cent of the school's population is made up of students from ethnic minority backgrounds but none is learning English as an additional language.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2715	Mr R Hancock	Lead inspector	
9115	Dr T Clarke	Lay inspector	
14871	Mrs B Buteux	Team inspector	English
30553	Mr R Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics
6432	Dr M Sewter	Team inspector	Science
2183	Dr P Thompson	Team inspector	ICT
1795	Mrs J Sanderson	Team inspector	History Special educational needs
10392	Mrs D Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography
17522	Mr N Stiles	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31821	Mr B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
30695	Mrs G Dinan	Team inspector	Art
18846	Mr P Priest	Team inspector	Music Citizenship
23891	Mr P Slape	Team inspector	Design and technology
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Economics (6 <sup>th</sup> Form)
4361	Mr R Boatman	Team inspector	Modern languages (6 <sup>th</sup> Form)
18912	Mrs C Large	Team inspector	Religious education

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Chelmsford County High School for Girls is a very effective school** providing good value for money. Standards are very high, the quality of teaching and learning is very good, and the school is very well led and managed.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The very high standards reached by students.
- The very good quality of teaching throughout the school.
- Students' very positive attitudes to school and their joy in learning.
- Very good leadership and management which keep the school moving forward.
- High expectations of behaviour and conduct creating an outstanding learning ethos.
- Limited provision for teaching information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11.
- A significant minority of students do not feel there is a person in the school they could talk to if they had a personal problem.
- The school's means for ensuring that pupils' views are heard and considered are not fully effective.

The school has made good progress since its last inspection in 1998. Standards are higher and the quality of teaching has much improved. The school has effectively addressed the key issues identified in the report. Progress on the consistent implementation of the assessment policy has been slower than on other issues but is now accelerating.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Standards are very high at both key stages and **the achievement of students is very good.**

Attainment on entry to the school is high in most subjects and, because of their own very positive attitudes to learning and very good teaching, students make very good progress so that by the end of Year 9 they have reached very high standards and their achievement is very good. They continue to maintain these standards through to the end of Year 11, which results in very high GCSE examination results, representing very good achievement. The overall performance of the school puts it in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. Standards of literacy and numeracy are very high which helps students' achievement, not only in English, science and mathematics, where standards are very high, but in all other subjects. In both key stages, students also reach standards which are very high in art, design and technology, history, geography and music. They do nearly as well in French, German and Latin but standards are not high enough in ICT. The few students with special educational needs achieve as well as others. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds excel.

The development of **students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good**, although their spiritual development is the least well fostered. Students' attitudes to school are very good. Their behaviour is also very good. Attendance rates are well above average and students arrive at school and to lessons on time.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The quality of education provided by the school is very good.** The overall quality of **teaching is also very good** and is frequently excellent at both key stages. It is especially strong in art, history, physical education and music. It is least good in lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE) because some teachers lack confidence in this area. Students appreciate the quality of teaching they receive and respond by concentrating well in class, by persevering with their tasks, and doing homework diligently. They take great pride in the appearance of their work. They are just as keen to work with others as they are on their own as occasion demands, and enjoy their learning.

A strong feature of the school is the extent to which students are encouraged to take on responsibility. A further distinctive feature of school life is the quality and range of extra-curricular activities, especially in music and sport, which adds to the personal development of the students. The school shows its innovative spirit in the way in which from time to time it suspends conventional lessons and gives students opportunities to develop insights into topics and new areas of study, such as its very successful Antarctica day.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Leadership and management are very good.** Visionary leadership has ensured that the school has particularly benefited from its technology college status. This development has led directly to many improvements, especially in science, to such an extent that the quality of education in this subject has now become a strength of the school. The senior team's strong focus on improving teaching and learning in all subjects has had a major impact on the quality of what happens in the classroom and resulted in raising students' achievement. The very successful development work that senior staff have undertaken with subject leaders means that these leaders have now emerged as powerful agents for change and growth in the quality of what the school offers. The work of the governing body is of very good quality. It works closely with the school to ensure a very safe learning environment and that financial expenditure is well regulated. Governors also encourage the school to have the confidence to launch initiatives such as its very successful programme of beacon school activities, to be innovative, and to take calculated risks whilst at the same time maintaining very high academic standards.

## PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very satisfied with the education provided by the school. They are pleased that their daughters enjoy school so much and that it helps them to achieve such high standards. Although just a few parents show concern that the school is not consistently reporting to them the National Curriculum Levels the students have reached and several do not think the school knows their daughters as individuals, the inspection team believes that the current work the school is undertaking with assessment is addressing the first issue and that its intention to develop further the role of the tutor provides an opportunity for the school to ensure that all students feel confident in approaching an adult if they have personal problems. Students are appreciative of the quality of the teaching they receive, speaking about the 'impassioned' way that teachers transmit knowledge and enthusiasm. They enjoy school. Whilst many feel that they have someone to turn to at school if they have a personal problem, a significant number, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, do not consider this to be the case. Many students feel that the school does not seek or respond to their views.

## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- To enhance provision for the teaching of ICT in Years 10 and 11 and increase the part that ICT plays in students' learning in the sixth form.

- To ensure that more effective means are developed for encouraging students to feel confident that they have someone in whom to confide and build on existing systems of consulting students, and acting on their ideas, where appropriate.

and to meet statutory requirements:

- To provide a daily act of collective worship.



## SIXTH FORM SUMMARY

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The sixth form is extremely effective** because it is highly successful in enabling students to follow courses of study which are excellently taught and which lead to university entry qualifications. Although costing more than many sixth forms, it is fully cost-effective because not only do large numbers of students meet with success on their chosen courses but they also have great scope in the sixth form to develop their personal qualities.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A wide range of very well organised courses.
- Very good and often excellent teaching which frequently inspires students.
- Very committed students who enjoy learning.
- A wide range of enrichment opportunities.
- Limited use of ICT in learning.
- The role of form tutor is still undeveloped.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Very good provision in English.</b> Very good achievement. Standards are well above average and students are very well taught. <b>Very good provision in French and German.</b> High standards and very good teaching <b>Very good provision in Latin.</b> Very good achievement. High standards and very good teaching.
Mathematics	<b>Very good provision in mathematics.</b> Very good achievement. Very good teaching and students' excellent work habits ensure that they reach very high standards.
Science	<b>Very good provision in chemistry.</b> Standards are consistently above the national average and the quality of teaching is very good.
Humanities	<b>Excellent provision in history.</b> Leadership and management are outstanding and standards are very high. Achievement is very good.
	<b>Very good provision in geography.</b> Standards are well above average at A-Level and students are very well taught. Achievement is very good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Very good provision in design and technology.</b> Well above average standards and very good teaching result in very good achievement.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good provision in art.</b> Teaching and learning are excellent and achievement is excellent. <b>Very good provision in music.</b> Standards are well above average and teaching is very good. Achievement is very good.
Business	<b>Excellent provision in economics.</b> Standards are very high and the quality of teaching is excellent. Achievement is excellent.

*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'.*

Other subjects sampled in the sixth form showed that achievement in biology and physics is very good, especially at the higher grades. Physical education is a compulsory subject in the sixth form and in the one lesson observed in Year 12 all students were fully committed and highly motivated. Achievement was very good. There is no specialist course in ICT. Standards in religious education are well above average, with students achieving very high grades in examinations. Teaching is

very good and students are very mature and perceptive, responding extremely well to the challenge of their work.

### **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

The strength of the guidance is to be found in the knowledge that teachers have of their subjects and of the course and study requirements. Students especially appreciate this and many turn readily to their subject teachers for good advice on subject matters. Although good careers advice is available, many students are not happy with it. The role of the tutor as mentor to students is under-developed. Advice and support are satisfactory overall.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

The head of sixth form had been in post only a matter of weeks at the time of the inspection, but had already started to establish a very good working relationship with the students and is earning their respect. She is working to very good effect in a very consultative way to resolve issues such as attendance during non-lesson time and this is appreciated by the students. Because the respect of students has been achieved in such a short time and because the improvement plan has identified the most important priorities for development, the **leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.**

### **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Students greatly enjoy their time in the sixth form. They admire and respect their subject teachers and appreciate the support they receive. They value their expertise and relish learning. A significant minority of students do not believe that there is an adult in the school who knows them well and to whom they would turn if they had a personal problem. There is an opportunity for this to be addressed through the developmental work the school is undertaking on the future role of the tutor. A sizeable minority believe that the school does not respond to their views and the sixth form leader has plans to rectify this perception. Significant numbers of students are also unimpressed by the careers advice they receive. The inspection team considers that provision is good, but that that the advice provided does not fully encompass the range of career opportunities open to students.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Standards are very high by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. The achievement of students is very good at both key stages.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- High, and mostly very high, standards throughout the school.
- Achievement is very good.
- Very high standards of literacy and numeracy.
- Standards are especially high in science and history.
- Standards are not as high in ICT as in other subjects.

#### Commentary

1. Standards are high on entry and the school is able to ensure that they become and remain very high through to the end of Year 11. Very high scores in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were in line with the school's pattern of results over time and show that the attainment of students lies in the top 5 per cent of all schools, with many reaching the higher levels in each of the three subjects. The results of tests in 2003 look to be maintaining this picture. Standards in other subjects are also high by the end of Year 9. The inspection of students' work indicates that very high standards are reached in all aspects of English, mathematics and science. Their skills of literacy and numeracy are especially well advanced and provide a very strong platform for the progress made in other subjects. The inspection of current and recent work undertaken by students in almost all other subjects shows that standards are very high. The school helps students to make very good progress and the majority of them achieve very well. Results on the GNVQ course (in ICT) in 2003 were not good enough, to a large extent due to staffing difficulties and problems associated with the teachers' inexperience with the demands of course work requirements.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	45.4 (43.2)	34.8 (34.4)
mathematics	48.0 (47.1)	34.7 (34.5)
science	45.5 (45.3)	33.3 (33.1)

*There were 120 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. Results in the GCSE examinations were very high in 2002 with almost all students reaching 5 or more grades at A\* - C, very high results in comparison with all maintained secondary schools and maintaining the performance of the previous three years. Significant numbers of students reached the highest grades in English, geography, history, French and music but results were also strong in mathematics. Results improved even further in 2003. Although the school's highest average points score was in 2000, since when it has declined slightly, and although the overall trend of improvement was below the national trend, the improved results in 2003 indicate no significant overall decline in results. Results in comparison with other schools based on the prior attainment of students were well above average for the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A\* - C, above average for five or more grades at A\* - G and very high for one or more grades at A\* - G. The average points score was well above average. This indicates that students make very good progress and achieve very well. The inspection of current and recent work undertaken by students shows that standards on

GCSE examination courses are very high. Students from an ethnic minority background excel and school records show that whenever students with special disabilities are on the roll they achieve as well as other students. The school's own analysis of the 2003 results indicates that it was students in the school's middle range of ability who did especially well in the GCSE examination in 2003.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	99 (99)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	72.2	39.8

*There were 110 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

#### **Standards in the sixth form**

Standards in the sixth form are very high and achievement is excellent.

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

- Particularly fine work on A-Level courses.
- Extremely high standards in history and economics.
- The achievement of students from the time they enter the sixth form to the time they take their A Level examinations.

#### **Commentary**

3. The average points score in the 2002 A-Level examination was very high in comparison with all schools. It was also very high in comparison with all providers. Results were especially strong in biology, chemistry, economics, English literature, classical studies, geography, mathematics and religious studies. History results, in particular, show a strong improving trend. Results were least strong in general studies. The school has undertaken extensive recent work on the value-added factors and this shows convincingly that the school is 'adding value' to the progress made by students from their time of entry. The school meets most of its academic targets, using A/B grades at A Level as bench-marks of success. French results at A Level have not been as high as they should be and German results have also needed improving but new strategies have been introduced and in 2003 results improved.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.5	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	80	39.4
Average point score per pupil	104.4	78.6

*There were 109 pupils in the year group.*

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

Attendance and punctuality are very good. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attendance.
- Students' very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The excellent way that the school stimulates in students a desire to learn.
- The high expectations the school sets for students' conduct.
- Students' confidence and self-esteem.
- Students' moral and social development.
- The initiative shown and responsibility taken by students.

## Commentary

4. Attendance at the school is very good at well above the national average. Students are punctual and if they are late to lessons or registration it is almost invariably due to the unreliability of the public transport system. On the rare occasions when a student has a problem with attendance, the school takes action to provide appropriate support. The high level of attendance is a positive factor in the students' educational success.

### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2001 – 2002 was 95.6%**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.3	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.*

5. Students' attitudes are very good. They like their school and are proud of it. They work hard and eagerly take part in the very wide range of extra-curricular activities, many of which are run by fellow students at the school. Whilst most feel that the school listens to their views, a significant minority feel this is not the case. Students are very willing to take responsibility from the time they arrive at the school in Year 7. For example, in a Year 7 tutorial period, students readily volunteered to take the following week's form assembly, which gave the teacher time to arrange a rota. Year 7 students also turned out in large numbers to help welcome potential students to an induction evening.
6. Sporting clubs are very popular with students, but they also enjoy and take part in a wide range of non-sporting activities, many of which they run themselves. Some students become involved at national level. A number of students volunteered to take part in the national under-15s debating competition during a debating club workshop. They also take responsibility within the school. Some become prefects and others are members of the school council. Students run assemblies and are usually responsible for the readings. A Year 9 student played the piano skilfully at assembly.
7. The behaviour of students is very good and the school has high expectations of their conduct. It is reviewing the system of rewards. Certificates were presented to students during a registration and at an assembly. Students say that bullying is not an issue and that if incidents of bullying occur they are quickly dealt with. Exclusions are very rare.
8. The school stimulates in students a desire to learn and they say that teachers make lessons 'fun'. They are confident that they are now being helped to understand about the different ways of learning.
9. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall. Their spiritual development is good and encouraged through 'Thought for the Day' and through periods of reflection in assemblies. However, in assemblies, opportunities for reflection are sometimes missed and the spiritual aspect of the curriculum is not sufficiently developed.

10. Students' moral and social development is excellent. One way they show this is by their support for different charities. Students even set up their own projects, for example to raise funds for poverty relief after a World Challenge trip to Ecuador. The students' social development was enhanced by having to raise their own funds for the trip. Other charities are supported well. Students' cultural development is very good, helped by the art and music at the school. Opportunities for multicultural development also come through exchange visits. Students develop very good understanding of the richness and diversity of their own and other cultures, such as Aboriginal, Aztec and European art. They visit a wealth of national and international museums and galleries in such places as Barcelona, New York and Moscow. In geography, students explore their own locality and contrast this with visits to rural, urban and seaside resorts further afield. In history there are excellent opportunities to study the parliamentary system when re-enacting the House of Commons. Students also visit Canterbury and the Elizabethan museum at Greenwich to extend their cultural understanding. Students take part in the Chelmsford Youth Arts Partnership, a weekly programme of dance drama and music.

## **Sixth form**

Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Their attendance and punctuality are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' willingness to be enterprising and take responsibility.
- Students' excellent attitudes and behaviour.
- Students' very good attendance and punctuality.

### **Commentary**

11. Students' attendance and punctuality are very good, similar to that in the main school. Students were unhappy about having to register first thing on days when they did not have a lesson until later in the day. They found it easier to work at home than in the library. However, the school reached an acceptable compromise with them.
12. Students' attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. They show a very good interest in school life, both academic and extra-curricular. Without the support of students in Years 12 and 13 a large number of activities could not take place. Interviewing students from the two years was a pleasure. They clearly love the school and all it has to offer them and appear grateful for what it does for them. They are very polite and helpful to visitors and make a major contribution to the smooth running of the school. For example, during the inspection the school had an induction day for potential new students and their families. Prefects helped to prepare the different displays and some gave presentations. Students assured inspectors about the absence of racism at the school and that it was a very friendly place.
13. That students showed an excellent willingness to be enterprising and take responsibility was made clear by their assertion that if they wanted to start a new club or society they arrange it themselves. Nearly all the extra-curricular activities have assigned prefects. For example, the political debating society has two prefects running it and both led the discussion at a lunchtime workshop. They are active in 'Student Voice' which is the school council. They are pleased with the Head of Sixth Form's initiative to form an additional Sixth Form Council, so that their voice can be heard separately from the lower school. Prefects also take school assemblies.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	579		1
White – Irish	3		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4		
Mixed – White and Black African	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	11		
Mixed – any other mixed background	15		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	27		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	16		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	4		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2		
Chinese	19		
Any other ethnic group	37		
No ethnic group recorded	111		

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

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. The overall quality of teaching is very good, the overall curriculum is good, and the school's work with the community through activities associated with its technology college and beacon school status are very good.

### Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school and is often excellent. There are no major differences in the quality of teaching between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The quality of learning is also very good through the school.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- All teachers have expert subject knowledge.
- Teachers show great enthusiasm for their subjects.
- Lessons are very well planned.
- Time is used effectively in lessons.
- Teachers make effective use of questioning to ensure that students understand key concepts.
- The quality of teaching is less good in PSHE.
- Teachers do not make enough use of ICT to develop students' learning.
- Students' are keen to learn in groups or as individuals.

## Commentary

14. The quality of teaching and learning is high. A major strength of teaching is the expert knowledge that teachers have of their subjects and the enthusiasm and skill with which they share this knowledge with the students. Students readily recognise this quality and often speak of their teachers as being inspirational. When they were at the very best, in just under one quarter of all lessons seen, teachers created joy and pleasure in learning, characteristics that were especially noticeable in the best lessons in English, science, music and history. Most lessons are extremely well managed and show strong evidence of very thorough planning. Time is very well used so that learning is maximised. Particularly effective were lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9 in which teachers shared the clear objectives of lessons with students, organised learning opportunities for all to progress and communicated to students how they would know if they had succeeded in reaching their objectives. Teachers make especially good use of the technique of questioning to elicit what students need to know about the areas they are studying.
15. Very challenging work is set for those capable of attaining at the very highest levels, but other students are far from neglected and those who find learning more difficult get good levels of support. Work is carefully marked so students learn what they have done well and what they have to do to succeed even further. This creates confidence in the students who are then encouraged to learn more. Resources are used to very good effect and in those subjects where support is essential, such as art and science, very high quality support staff enable the teachers to make the very best use of their skills. Especially good use is made of field-work and visits to centres of educational and cultural interest, such as galleries, to enhance further the learning of the students. Lessons were very good or excellent in over one half of all lessons seen in the main school.
16. Lessons in PSHE are less well taught than lessons in other subjects. Whilst always at least satisfactory and occasionally even good, overall they do not have the same sense of drive and purpose as lessons in other subjects. In some of these lessons it was not always clear what the objective was and time was not well used as students were often given too long to complete trivial and undemanding tasks which did not advance their learning. In a few lessons in other subjects, pace occasionally flags and learning is not as great as it needs to be. On the whole, teachers are not making enough use of ICT to enhance learning. Some are not making enough effective use of assessment to pinpoint where the students need to go next.
17. Students' learning is very good and sometimes excellent. Their powers of concentration are outstanding. Their motivation is always very high. Their work shows great attention to detail and is produced to the very highest standards. They are just as capable of working on their own as working in groups. They make best use of their high levels of skills in literacy and numeracy but could make more use in their learning of their undoubted aptitude for applying ICT.
18. The school has worked hard and very effectively to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. In nine out of ten lessons it is now good or better and this represents very good progress, with improvements in the proportion of excellent teaching being especially marked.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 95 lessons in Years 7-11**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
20 (21%)	31 (33%)	33 (35%)	11 (11%)	0	0	0

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



## Sixth form teaching

The teaching in the sixth form is very good overall, and often excellent. A high degree of subject knowledge is the hallmark of the teaching which often inspires the students to learn.

### Main strength and weaknesses

- Teaching is excellent in a significant number of lessons.
- The quality of teaching is especially good in art, history and economics.
- Teachers have a high degree of subject knowledge.
- Teachers employ effective ways of imparting enthusiasm to students.

### Commentary

19. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and often excellent. Teachers have a deep and extensive knowledge of their subject and are thoroughly grounded in the requirements of examination courses. This means that students are extending their knowledge and furthering their understanding and are being extremely well prepared for examinations. They receive extremely good feedback from their teachers so that they know what they have accomplished and what they have to do to get even better. The relatively weaker aspects are the lack of pace in some geography lessons and the lack of variety in some lessons in mathematics. Generally speaking, sixth form teachers do not make enough use of ICT to enhance students' learning.
20. Students learn very well. Their concentration in lessons is very good and their application to study to support their work in class is impressive. They show that they have the skills to carry out research and investigative work. They are capable of working independently or with others equally well. They are very highly motivated and show a strong determination to succeed whilst at the same time thoroughly enjoying their learning in the company of teachers whom they both respect and admire.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 43 lessons in Years 12 and 13

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10 (23%)	21 (49%)	10 (23%)	2 (5%)	0	0	0

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

## The curriculum

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is good overall. The wide range of academic courses is appropriate for the very able students. They have good opportunities to study languages and to devote a significant amount of time to the study of science.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The breadth and range of the academic curriculum are good.
- Opportunities for enrichment are very good, particularly in sport and music.
- Accelerated learning is good and improves achievement in English.
- Opportunities to learn vocational and work-related skills are not varied or extensive.
- Planned opportunities for students to learn ICT in Years 10 and 11 are not provided.

## Commentary

21. The curriculum is broad and covers a good range of academic subjects. It caters for the interests and aptitudes of the students well. Nearly all students progress to the sixth form. The extensive core curriculum enables students to take three sciences, two modern languages and design and technology. All students have equal access to the rest of the curriculum but must select three subjects from a list of ten options in Years 10 and 11. Latin and drama are optional. Students can experience cross-curricular links through 'special links', the most recent being 'Antarctic Day'. Statutory requirements are met. The very few students who have special educational needs are well catered for because the school clearly identifies their specific disabilities and addresses them effectively. They make the same progress as other students.
22. The time allocated to the sciences is significantly above the national norm and is one of the reasons why this subject is so successful in the school. Standards in English and mathematics are slightly affected by the reduced time allocated to these subjects, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The times allocated to religious studies and design and technology are below the national norms and have some impact on the range of work that can be covered in these subjects. The new provision of accelerated learning in Years 7 to 9 is a very good innovation and is already improving achievement in English
23. A good range of talks on employment and the world of work are provided both during and after the normal school day and students have the opportunity to participate in the Young Enterprise programme. All students undertake three weeks of work experience and are given good careers advice in Year 11. The work-related programme, although present, is not sufficiently varied or extensive to ensure that students are learning enough about work and how to prepare for it. In Years 10 and 11, there are no vocational, applied or ICT courses. In design and technology, courses in food and textiles are not available which means that the curriculum is narrower than it needs to be.
24. There is a well planned PSHE programme delivered by form tutors. The programme has strong features such as the use of video material, visiting speakers and links with a wide range of organisations, such as the police and health agencies. Members of the sixth form are trained to contribute to the sex and drugs awareness aspects of the programme and this peer education is valued by the students. The school's approach to the teaching of PHSE has changed recently. The programme is taught by tutors in order to give them more time with their groups but there is considerable inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning of this programme.
25. Extra-curricular provision is very good. The school encourages all students to participate in extra-curricular events and so enjoy informal learning, broaden their experience or simply enjoy themselves. To this end, members of staff and a significant number of students of all ages have established a wide range of activities which serve creative, cultural and physical interests. Senior staff have an overview of the nature of this provision where initiative is encouraged and opportunities for leadership abound. Response is positive and large numbers of students are involved, especially in sport and music and up to one third of all students, including sixth formers, can be involved in something during lunch times and after school. A significant number may be involved in activities on or off site at weekends. The commitment of students to activities is high. All subject areas contribute to extra-curricular provision but the range and quality of provision in art, sport, music and history is excellent.
26. The match of well-qualified teachers to the needs of the curriculum is very good overall, although the school has experienced problems recruiting and retaining teachers in ICT. The provision of teaching assistants is very good. They are effective and enable specialist teachers to visit other schools and attend courses and conferences regularly. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The new teaching block provides science with good accommodation.

The teaching rooms in English and history are too small and generally crowded. The art studio and gymnasium are barely adequate.

### **How well does the curriculum meet pupils' needs in the sixth form?**

The sixth form curriculum is good overall because it provides well for very able students with the specific aim of entering higher education and is enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities which further broadens the students' personal development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The breadth of the curriculum is good.
- Opportunities for enrichment are very good, particularly in sport and music.
- The match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is very good.
- Vocational and ICT courses are not offered.

### **Commentary**

27. The curriculum is broad and covers a good range of academic subjects. It caters well for the interests and aptitudes of the students. Nineteen out of twenty students progress to universities or gap-year activities after leaving the school. One in ten achieve Oxford or Cambridge places. All students have a mock interview provided by professional people in various fields, organized by the parents' Association. Additional mock interviews are available for all students called to interview by a university or prospective employer. Interviews with the Connexions adviser are available on request. Students attend a higher education Superfair at a local university and the school holds its own careers fair with representatives of local industry, commerce, the armed forces, public services and higher education in attendance. Other good features include the general studies programme, which broadens students' minds, and the fact that all students take part in physical education activities.
28. The curriculum offers open access to 19 subjects and covers the creative and expressive arts, humanities, languages (including Latin), science and mathematics and technology well. Most girls take four or five A-Level courses. The very few students with special educational needs are catered for well. Most have physical disabilities and make the same progress as other students.
29. The area of technology in the curriculum is confined to an A-Level course in graphics with materials technology. Courses in business studies, food technology, ICT and textiles are not provided. A good range of talks on employment and the world of work are provided both during and after the normal school day and the school participates in the engineering education scheme. A very good two-day conference is offered on 'The Challenge of Management' each year and students may opt to participate in 3 or 4 weeks of work experience under the 'Internship' programme.
30. There is a very good match of well-qualified and dedicated teachers to the needs of the curriculum. However, there are insufficient numbers of specialist teachers available to support any extension of the curriculum into vocational and work-related areas. Good use is made of external speakers. The provision of technicians varies from one curriculum area to another. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The new teaching block provides science with good accommodation but the art studio is not adequate.
31. Additional academic support provided by 'drop in' clinics for examination revision or extension classes for higher papers at AS and A-Level are much appreciated by students. The time provided for subject enrichment through educational trips and through fieldwork is generous and reflects the school's desire to broaden students' educational experience. Unusual activities attract attention, such as the microscopy master classes. The programmes of the history and debating society are full of opportunities for intellectual stimulation as well as

development of personal skills. A great deal of thought has gone into the aims and objectives of what is offered.

## **Care, guidance and support**

The arrangements for students' care, welfare and safety are good. The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is satisfactory. The involvement of students through the school's seeking, valuing and acting on students' views is satisfactory.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are very good procedures to ensure that students work in a healthy and safe environment.
- There are good induction arrangements for students joining the school.
- Significant numbers of students, especially in the senior school, do not feel there is an adult they could turn to if they had a problem.

## **Commentary**

32. The school's provision for the students' care, welfare and safety is good. It is good because child protection procedures are secure and the procedures for dealing with accidents and illness are good. An experienced and caring first-aider is always at hand if needed. Procedures to ensure that students work in a healthy and safe environment are very good, with governors, through the premises sub-committee, having overall responsibility.
33. The induction procedures for students joining the school at the ends of Key Stages 2 and 4 are good. The process was starting during the week of the inspection, with potential new students being introduced to the school at an open evening. In spite of there being over 70 contributing primary schools, a member of staff manages to visit all primary age students selected by the school. By the time of the inspection, over a month into their first term, Year 7 students had settled down well. Most Year 12 students, who had entered the sixth form from other schools spoke highly of the support and welcome they had received when they transferred.
34. There is a perception by a significant minority of students that they do not know to which adult they would turn, should they need advice or guidance with personal problems. This information came from the student questionnaires and the view was confirmed when inspectors spoke to students. Most, however, had the confidence to approach their subject teachers should the problem be an academic one. There is an appropriate pastoral system in place, of which most students are aware, but many students do not appear to have confidence in it. The group of students from Year 10 and 11 who were interviewed said that teachers were very approachable and so did students in Year 7. Form tutors have a one-to-one interview with students about their reports and this term the school is introducing a system whereby tutors are being given more time with individual or small groups of students. The relationships in Year 7 tutor groups seem very good. The school is strengthening the tutorial system in order to improve communication and help to ease any misconception students may have. The school emphasises to parents that the form tutor is pivotal to the school's pastoral system.
35. Students have career lessons from Year 9, but some feel that they do not necessarily get the best advice unless they are going on to take A levels and are going into one of the professions. This affects only a few students but there is a gap between their perception of their careers education and that of the school. The school seeks the students' views of the school through 'Student Voice', which is the school council. Students have seen some valuable improvements in matters they have raised: for example, wearing trousers is now a uniform option and the toilets have been refurbished. Nevertheless, significant numbers of these highly articulate students do not feel that they are necessarily listened to, which means that the processes by which the school communicates with the full student body need to be improved.

## **Sixth form**

The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring and the involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views are, overall, satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A sixth form panel interview new staff.
- Very good support is provided for students who fall behind due to illness.
- A minority of students do not feel there is an adult available to give them independent personal advice.
- Some of the students not planning to go on to a career in the professions feel that they would like more and better careers advice.

### **Commentary**

36. The school seeks to involve students in its decisions, for example, through 'Student Voice', and through including a sixth form panel in the process of interviewing applicants for teaching posts. In spite of this, a significant number of students do not feel that they have enough say in the running of the school. This emerged from the sixth form questionnaires. This year the Head of Sixth Form has instituted a sixth form council so that there is more discussion with the sixth form of issues specific to them.
37. Some sixth form students do not perceive that they can identify an appropriate adult in the school who they would go to with personal problems. They believe that the loss to the school of the school nurse, who used to run a 'drop in' centre, has taken away an independent person to whom they can go. The majority of sixth formers, however, say that they have a good relationship with their tutor, whom they would be happy to go to. A student spoke warmly of the very good support she received when she fell behind in her work due to being off school for a long time, due to sickness.
38. In spite of the concern of some students about careers advice, impartial guidance on further study or career opportunities is good. Effective use is made of outside speakers, and students are able to attend 'Challenge Management' conferences. They participate in internships with companies and use the services provided by Connexions. They also find out things for themselves. Students say that last year they thought that the careers' teacher did not have the time to help all of them. Senior staff believe that as articulate young adults it is better for them to do much of their own research into possible careers, once provided with good resources, advice on how to undertake research, and access to advice from the Connexions adviser and Head of Careers, but some students lack the confidence and range of skills to do this.

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

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has strong educational links with other schools.
- The schools' links with the community are strong.
- Parents expressed very positive views about the school.
- The Parents' Association supports the school well.
- The school provides a wide range of information about itself and about students' progress.
- The school has good arrangements for seeking the views of parents.

## **Commentary**

39. Parents have very positive views of the school and they are expected to play a significant part in their daughters' education. Although some concern was expressed at the parents' meeting at the lack of friendliness to new recruits to the sixth form by other students, it was not confirmed on talking to sixth form students. The reverse was true. A number of 'thank you' cards, received after students have left showed how much parents, and students, appreciate the education of their daughters.
40. Parents play a significant part in the education of students. For example, the attendance at parents' open evenings, the involvement in students' homework through the students' log-books, and helping with mock interviews for all students all help students to make progress. By raising significant sums of money, the Parents' Association helps to provide extra resources for the school which help to support different aspects of students' learning. For example, the £20,000 raised last year was used to purchase computer laptops and trolleys, science skeletons, fitness equipment, clothing for games, and speech day prizes. Some of it also went towards refurbishing the hall.
41. The school provides good information through the prospectus and governors' annual report and, about students' progress, through good quality reports. The reports, however, do not indicate the National Curriculum levels at which students are working. The governors regularly seek parents' views of the school by sending out questionnaires. The school also links with parents through its web-site.
42. The school's links with the community and businesses are very good. The premises are extensively used by the community, for example adult education and the Healthy Living Centre. The local women's refuge see the school as a 'safe' place and the residents use the school's swimming pool as well as using the school for 'family' days. Visitors to the school support students' education; for example, a theatre group provided the basis for a Year 7 PSHE lesson during the inspection on road safety and peer pressure. Other visitors include one from NATO and another, an ex-pupil, from the United Nations. Students can arrange their own work experience although the school arranges most of it through Trident. The school also has many community links through its music. These are just a few of the links with the community, many of which help to enrich students' education.
43. The school's links with other schools and colleges are very good. The students in Year 7 come from 70 primary schools, both from the public and private sectors, and staff at the school visit all the schools during the students' induction period. However, many of the school's other links come through its status as a beacon school and as a technology college. For example, two advanced skill teachers (ASTs) have provided a large amount of outreach work in under-performing schools. Other areas of beacon activity include involvement with assessment, gifted and talented students, staff professional development and the use of ICT. All the beacon activities involve close links with other schools and colleges. The school has helped one such school to come out of special measures.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good. Enterprising leadership has enabled the school to achieve important status as a technology college and as a beacon school, both of which have been turned to great advantage by very effective management. Heads of subject in particular are now providing very effective leadership. The support provided by the governing body is very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership of the headteacher is very enterprising.
- There is a strong emphasis on self-improvement by subject leaders.

- There are very good systems for review and analysis.
- Planning mechanisms are effective and there are good evaluation procedures.
- ICT has not been introduced effectively enough.
- The assessment policy has still not been fully implemented.

## Commentary

44. The leadership and management of the school are very good with some excellent features. The school has been very successful in achieving further status, first as a technology college and secondly as a beacon school. It is now working towards achieving 'Leading Edge' status. The headteacher, working in concert with the governing body, has been instrumental in ensuring that the school looks to enhance its status further and has been very successful in doing so. The acquisition of each status has added considerably to the quality of what the school offers to its students, firstly, in terms of technology and, secondly, in terms of service to the community. The headteacher has been able to lead the school to extend and enrich the students' learning experiences whilst at the same time maintaining very high academic standards and this represents leadership of high quality.
45. Very good leadership is also provided by other members of the senior leadership team and also by heads of subjects and heads of house. Each of these teachers has a clear vision of what they want to achieve and the skills to take others along with them. At the time of the last inspection, the role of managers in the middle tier of leadership was undeveloped but this has now undergone a radical change and one of the major reasons for the success of the school is the vigour with which these managers have assumed the responsibility for ensuring that the area for which they are responsible fully shares the same vision as the rest of the school. This gives a consistency and coherence to the school as can be seen from its strong emphasis on helping all students to achieve very high academic success.
46. The governing body is of high quality. Its members keep in close touch with the school by receiving reports on key areas of the school's work and through frequent visits. It holds the school to account by analysing and questioning its performance in some detail. It ensures that the school is a safe and secure place. It provides further expertise to help ensure that the school manages its finances well. A particular strength of the governing body is its shared strategic vision for the school's future. In its insistence on the maintenance of very high academic standards, whilst broadening the education of students through the encouragement of innovative practices, such as the 'drop a day' curriculum initiative, it is perfectly in tune with the views of the headteacher. Governance as a whole is satisfactory. In general, the governing body's work is very good but the school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.
47. Performance management is now at an advanced stage of development which means that all staff are used to setting rigorous targets, for both their own management and the progress expected of students, reviewing the outcomes and taking appropriate action to consolidate strengths and rectify weaknesses. The school has excellent review systems to help ensure that its school improvement plan is on track, that departments are achieving appropriately and that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained by an effective programme of classroom observations. The school has been very successful in ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is always improving through making it an important priority of its work and ensuring that in-service professional development supports it. A further strength is the skill and care that are brought to the appointment of new staff which helps to ensure that departments are very well led through the development of a strong team ethos, that subjects are staffed by high quality teachers and that the school's leadership team consists of personnel with complementary strengths consistent with the school's priorities.
48. Innovative practices include the entitlement for all staff to focus on following up their own priorities to help towards the reduction of stress. This practice, carefully monitored by the governing body, has proved remarkably successful in its contribution to ensuring an

appropriate work-life balance and to helping staff feel that they are valued and understood. The use of support staff to relieve teachers of basic administrative tasks is also helping to raise standards as it means that teachers are not deflected from their focus on helping all students to achieve the highest possible academic levels. The support provided by technicians is of the highest order and is helping teachers, in science and art in particular, to provide a much wider breadth of learning experiences than would otherwise be possible.

49. Although the school keeps in close touch with parents through regular canvassing of their views, it does not use similar methods for keeping in touch with the views of its students. Consequently, although it has some means for ensuring that the views of students are heard through the use of 'Student Voice', it is not in a position to say what its students most value about the school and where they might have the sorts of concerns that the responses to the students' questionnaire revealed.

## **Sixth form leadership and management**

The newly appointed head of sixth form is providing very good leadership by ensuring that students are effectively consulted on major issues which affect them. Management is very good as there is an effective plan for improvement and it is supported by a convincing plan for its implementation.

### **Main strengths and weakness**

- There is a good improvement plan.
  - Action planning is of good quality.
  - Effective processes for consultation have been introduced.
50. Leadership and management are very good. Newly appointed, the head of sixth has already identified appropriate priorities for future development supported by an action plan. This places great emphasis on creating a scholarly atmosphere in which students can continue to flourish academically and on the development of the role of the form tutor to support their academic and personal progress. Students greatly enjoy their time in the sixth form and especially appreciate the quality of the teaching but a significant minority of students, especially in Year 13, do not feel that there is a person in the school to whom they might take personal problems, something which the development of the tutor role should address. Although some students are given opportunities to affect the development of the school, for instance by contributing to the submissions that governors prepare when seeking a new status for the school, or when their views are sought on the acceptability of applicants for senior staffing positions, this aspect is not strong. Although the school conducts an 'exit poll' when students are at the end of their sixth form careers, there is currently no systematic means of gauging how current students feel about their time in the sixth form and how it might improve. Whilst the opportunities for broadening learning are good through the promotion of special events, which extend students' knowledge and introduce new skills, there is insufficient emphasis on the role of ICT in enhancing learning.

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

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,198,919
Total expenditure	3,263,546
Expenditure per pupil	3,913

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	147,557
Balance carried forward to the next	82,930



# **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 **very good**.

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

- GCSE examination and National Curriculum test results are well above average.
- Standards in reading and writing are very high and are even more outstanding in speaking and listening.
- Most students make very rapid progress and their achievement is very good.
- Highly skilled teachers stimulate students to become independent learners.
- Students are encouraged to think for themselves and express their views confidently.
- There are too few opportunities for shared learning through group work.
- There is insufficient discussion and analysis of literature in Years 10 and 11.
- Rooms are not big enough for the size of classes.
- The library is not used enough as a learning resource.

#### **Commentary**

51. Standards of work observed matched the performance reached by students in the National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations. A particular strength is the outstanding quality of students' speaking and listening skills which enables them to express their ideas concisely and coherently. This benefits their written work, which is above average when they enter the school, and provides a very strong platform for them to achieve well in other subjects. As a result of sensitive teaching tailored to their needs, students make very good progress and nearly every student reaches the highest level in the tests at the end of Year 9. New systems for accelerated learning provide excellent opportunities for students to advance more rapidly to take the national tests at the end of Year 8 which provides scope for a wider range of study to enrich students' learning in Years 10 and 11. Students' work is marked regularly, and their achievements and progress are well recorded.
52. A strength of the teaching is the skilful use of questioning which encourages students to think for themselves and to search out the deeper meanings found in stories, plays, poems and non-fiction material. As a result, students acquire knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts, developing research skills in the process which equip them with the learning habit. This innovative approach is the key to the stimulating teaching which inspires students to take an active part in their own learning and whets their appetites for further discoveries. This is the reason why they are achieving the high results which show significant improvements since the last inspection. The department is well led and the best use is made of the resources available. However, accommodation is limited and large classes do not have enough space for effective group work. The library is not equipped for research or for the shared learning the students need to undertake through group work. The department has made good progress since the last inspection although there is still insufficient use of ICT applications when students undertake presentations.

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

53. Students' fluent use of language and very well developed literacy skills are reflected in all subjects across the curriculum. Students speak eloquently on a range of topics discussing their work confidently with each other. They explain their ideas coherently and explore

different viewpoints with skill and courtesy. This capacity for developing logical, well-presented arguments is a major contributory reason for students' very high overall attainment. In most subjects students' outstanding speaking skills fuel their writing because they use a range of language confidently. They select vocabulary specific to the subject studied and use this language appropriately to develop rational arguments. Students are given good opportunities in English lessons to refine their reading skills of skimming and scanning a range of texts to select relevant information which they record concisely. This transference of literacy skills makes a valuable contribution to their achievements overall.

## **Modern foreign languages**

Provision for modern foreign languages is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' excellent knowledge and use of the language set an excellent example.
- Teachers' high expectations lead to high standards.
- Students' positive attitudes foster very good relationships with teachers.
- A review of all French schemes of work is well under way.
- A relatively small number of students study two languages in Years 10 and 11.
- Students are not confident in speaking, other than in pairs or in very small groups.

### **Commentary**

54. Students in Years 7 to 9 study French and German and have the opportunity to continue to study either or both languages in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' assessments of students' work suggest that standards are well above average at the end of Year 9 and work seen during the inspection confirms this. Students' understanding of the foreign language is very good because the language is the normal means of communication during lessons. Students develop very competent skills when using the language, especially in writing, where they have valuable experience in drafting paragraphs with significant detail. Their oral skills are less advanced, partly because they lack the confidence to speak fluently in larger groups, although most students are very happy to use the foreign language in pair work. In Year 11, students' attainment is well above average, though the number of students who choose two foreign languages is relatively small. Teachers prepare the students very well for the GCSE examination. Although speaking remains the weakest skill, students' understanding of spoken and written language is very high, as is the standard of their written work: this results in a very good level of achievement for all students.
55. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have an excellent command of the foreign language and they use it to maximum effect in the classroom. They use a variety of strategies and techniques for teaching and make very good use of homework tasks to support learning. They have high expectations and set challenging tasks. ICT is regularly used to enhance learning. The services of the foreign language assistants are invaluable in providing high quality oral group work. The quality of students' learning is very good, not least because the vast majority approach their studies with a very positive and committed attitude. They absorb the work readily, enjoy language learning and work hard. Most present their work impeccably. However, a small minority of students in Year 9 who do not give teachers adequate respect and attention, prevent others from learning effectively.
56. Since the recent appointment of a new head of French a great deal of work has been set in train to modernise the teaching and to bring systems for teaching the language up-to-date. More relevant schemes of work are being introduced and assessment is beginning to be used to set more targets and improve the already very good standards. Although students' work is valued, little was on display during the inspection.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high because of teachers' high expectations and students' enthusiasm and industry.
- Students learn rapidly because they are very adept at interpreting information, and enjoy working independently.
- Teaching is very good with some inspiring approaches.
- Teachers do not clearly inform students of standards by assessing their written work in sufficient detail.

### Commentary

57. National Curriculum test results in Year 9 are very high and represent very good achievement. Students' high levels of attainment on entry to the school are very effectively developed so that they are more than two years ahead of pupils nationally by the time they reach the end of Year 9. Trends in attainment have reflected the national improvement. GCSE examination results are very high; virtually all students achieve grades A\* to C with over half gaining A\* or A, compared with ten per cent nationally. Work seen in lessons and in exercise books mostly reflects these very high standards but insufficient teaching time in Year 11 and students' lack of experience in investigative work hamper some of the students' attainment.
58. Very good teaching ensures excellent standards of achievement in Years 7 to 9. Students learn very rapidly, especially when they are inspired by interesting approaches. In Year 7, students appreciated the power of a calculator when they realised that, by successive approximations, they could work out the length of the side of a cube of given volume. In Year 9, students measured the differing length of runner beans and participated throughout the resulting data analysis; this resulted in excellent learning about the concepts of cumulative frequency and its applications.
59. Very good teaching ensures excellent continuity into Year 10. At an early stage students are meeting the expectations of the more advanced GCSE examination requirements. Students were intrigued by the representation of recurring decimals as fractions and for others, comparing the proportions of conical hats provided visual stimulus when extending two-dimensional techniques to calculation of curved surface area. In Year 11, students work competently to GCSE grade A and A\* standards; their understanding of graphs and related functions is enhanced by the use of computers in presentations and in their own applications.
60. Generally, students learn techniques very well, but there is too much emphasis on the abstract in examples, lacking relevant contextual links. Students achieve very well overall but on occasions progress is less than it might be, when teachers misjudge the pace at which students can work and tasks lack challenge. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students engage in independent learning, enthusiastically working from a text, but need more support in order to interpret answers, for example, when making approximations. Teachers are good at adjusting the pace of lessons according to students' responses but there is insufficient assessment of students' written work to inform them of standards attained.
61. The newly appointed head of mathematics has conducted a thorough audit of the work of the department and pinpointed priorities for development. These are well judged to include emphasis on mathematical investigations in order to make mathematics more relevant and equip students to improve standards in GCSE examination coursework. The department is making progress to conform with the school's new assessment and recording policy. Since the last inspection, students have increased in confidence and are challenged at each stage of the

course. The overall progress made by the department has been good. Further work needs to be done to broaden the methods by which students learn, including the use of a wider range of ICT skills in mathematics.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

62. Students' very high standards in mathematics equip them very well for using mathematics in other subjects. In technology they are good at accurate measurement and making estimates; they have the algebraic skills to manipulate formulae in electronics. In art their spatial concepts are suitably advanced to apply two-dimensional representation of objects with attention to scale and perspective. Analysis of statistical tables, working with graphs and calculations of correlation are handled well in geography. In science, teachers plan to develop scientific understanding by building upon students' sound mathematical knowledge.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are consistently well above the national average and achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is very good overall and sometimes is outstanding.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and lesson planning is very good.
- Students are very enthusiastic and behaviour is exemplary.
- The central recording and analysis of assessment data is not sufficiently developed and some students are not well informed about how they might improve.
- ICT is not used enough by students.

### **Commentary**

63. Standards are consistently well above the national average, and there is no significant difference in the attainment of different groups of students. The results of national tests at the end of Year 9 are very high at Levels 6 and 7 and above, and this has been so for the past four years. The proportion of students gaining Level 7 and above has steadily increased over the same period and represents very good achievement for most students over their first three years in the school. In comparison with schools that have students with similar prior attainment, and in the same free school meals category, they are well above the average at these higher levels. Students of all abilities in Year 7 demonstrate well-developed practical skills and excellent understanding of how they might prepare a microscope slide of stained cheek cells. Others in Year 9 also show very good understanding of the structure and function of root hair cells and discussion was lively and informative.
64. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are also well above average. All students study three science subjects (physics, chemistry and biology) at GCSE examination level and they do very well indeed. Achievement is very good and typically all students gain passes in the A\*-C range. Moreover, the proportion gaining the highest grades has recently increased to more than four out of five students gaining A\* or A in 2003. In comparison with all selective schools, the proportion of students gaining these higher grades is also well above the average. Students in Year 11 show very good knowledge and understanding in their interpretation of work on the factors affecting enzyme activity. Similarly, students in Year 10 speak confidently about their understanding of halogen-halide displacement reactions. Levels of challenge, pace and productivity are high. In all lessons, students show high levels of initiative, responsibility and maturity in the way they work independently and in small groups.
65. The quality of teaching and learning in science is very good overall and there are examples of excellent practice in both key stages. This is a strength of the department. The recent use of

starter and plenary activities, and the introduction of a wider range of teaching and learning strategies are strong features of many lessons. Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of their specialist subjects, although standards of marking vary across subjects. Thorough and detailed planning, together with the very effective use of resources and focused questioning, help students to do very well and they respond with energy and enthusiasm.

66. The leadership and management of science are very good and documentation is helpful and of high quality. The large team of teachers and technicians are very well supported by the head of department and all have high expectations of their students. There is a keen sense of purpose to their work, and their knowledge and understanding of science is high. The team of technicians makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning of all students and is unique in its provision of in-service professional development for technicians from other schools in the area.
67. Since the appointment of the head of department in 1999, there has been considerable improvement in the way the science curriculum is organised, together with enhanced resources to support new courses and styles of teaching, learning and assessment. All of these support learning very well, and the number of students continuing to study science beyond the age of 16 is increasing year on year. Supported by outreach provision, liaison with science co-ordinators in some partnership primary schools is very good and shared activities are well organised. The forensic science day with primary children was very successful and the department has produced an excellent record and teaching resource on CD-ROM. However, the use of ICT by all students is insufficient. Assessment is rigorous and regular, but the use and access of a whole school database for recording and analysis is limited as yet. Science has a popular and positive image and is enjoyed by all students and the quality of students' work on display is excellent. Progress since the last inspection has been very good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' attitudes, application and productivity are very good.
- Help given by teachers to individual students in lessons is very good.
- The computer facilities are very good.
- Opportunities for accelerating learning in Years 7 to 9 are good.
- There is no planned provision for ICT in the curriculum in Years 10 and 11.
- Insufficient emphasis is given to teaching basic ICT principles in the GNVQ course.

### **Commentary**

68. Students' standards of attainment when they enter the school are well above the national average. In 2001, the school introduced accelerated learning for all in Years 7 to 9. In 2002, the results of the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 9 showed that almost nine out of ten students obtained A\* - C grades; just under a third with A\* - A grades, a very high result compared with the national average for all schools where students generally take the examination at the end of Year 11. This was a good achievement. In 2003, the unconfirmed results in the GNVQ examinations taken at the end of Year 9 were broadly in line with the national average, again where most students are examined at the end of Year 11. This was an unsatisfactory achievement caused, mainly, by many staff changes. The achievement observed in lessons during the inspection was satisfactory.
69. In 2002, the results in the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 showed that almost nine out of ten students obtained A\* - C grades; just under a third with A\* - A grades, a result which was very high compared with the national average. This was a satisfactory achievement. No specialist course is now offered in Years 10 and 11. Students apply ICT in

art, design and technology, English, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and science courses satisfactorily.

70. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes very good. All teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and give help to individual students in practical activities well. Relationships are very good. In the GNVQ course, planning for the completion of work to deadlines has improved and is now good. As a result, students' attitudes, application and productivity are very good. Students are eager to use the computer rooms outside normal school hours. There is insufficient emphasis given to teaching basic ICT principles and knowledge and understanding. Students learn to become independent users of the main types of computer programs and the Internet by the time they reach the end of Year 9.
71. The senior staff provide very good leadership and have a clear vision of what needs to be achieved but there have been many changes in specialist staff, which has hampered progress. The recently appointed head of department has made a good beginning by implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy in Year 7, reorganising the GNVQ teaching schemes in Years 8 and 9 and defining targets for the completion of work. He is well supported and all teachers are working together to improve standards and achievement. The technicians are very supportive and effective. Changes since the last inspection have been unsatisfactory because in Years 10 and 11 standards and achievement are not as consistently good and students' progress is less sure due to the absence of a specialist course. However, the quality of teaching has been maintained and the computing facilities significantly improved.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

72. Although there is good use of ICT in some subjects, such as geography and design and technology, its use to enhance learning is underdeveloped in most others.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

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

- High standards are sustained over time.
- Good teaching promotes good learning.
- The use of fieldwork and ICT to support and extend learning is a strength.
- There is insufficient pace and challenge in some lessons, especially in Years 7 to 9.

#### **Commentary**

73. Results in the GCSE examinations are well above average. Students reach above average standards in teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9. Achievement overall is good.
74. By the end of Year 9, students acquire a good breadth of knowledge. Written work and oral responses reflect sound understanding of the physical and human contrasts between places and an increasing confidence in the use of subject vocabulary. Good quality assessments indicate an acquisition of new skills, such as fieldwork techniques to gather first hand information, the effective application of skills in numeracy and literacy and an extensive use of ICT. Students gain in self-knowledge through group and self-evaluation but marking does not give students enough information about the standards they achieve. Students in Year 11 extend their thinking to explain, often in some depth, the links between contrasting places and the impact of economic change. Their application of ICT skills is particularly impressive. Whereas the majority of students bring together their knowledge and understanding and apply

their skills to produce excellent GCSE examination coursework or assessments, in Years 7-9 the same rigour is not evident in their everyday class work or their homework. Students' recall of prior learning is good as can be seen from the results of tests and in lessons but their recall of mapping skills in both Years 9 and 11 is not good enough.

75. The quality of teaching is mostly good. Students benefit from knowledgeable and well-organised teachers whose planning ensures they consolidate and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills. Teachers benefit from students who want to learn and whose exemplary behaviour enables them to teach effectively. The planning of fieldwork is particularly good, ensuring that the first hand experience is relevant to a range of topics and skills and to students' personal development. Resources are used effectively. Opportunities for independent learning allow students to assume responsibility for their own work although teachers' expectation of productivity within lessons is not high enough. Students are capable of doing more. The pace of learning within lessons, especially in Years 7 to 9 is too slow. Students achieve too easily because the activities used in lessons do not always provide a sufficient incline of difficulty to progressively challenge and test student capabilities. The majority of older students are capable of being extended beyond the confines of GCSE. Although teachers have the use of PowerPoint projectors and the necessary expertise, these are not used as a tool for teaching in everyday lessons.
76. Experienced and highly professional leadership has resulted in good improvement since the last inspection. Management is good and is receptive to new ideas as can be seen in the effective use of assessment, the creation of the geography Intranet site and the introduction of very good work relating to citizenship. Resources are used effectively and the use of fieldwork in all areas of learning is excellent. Teamwork is evident in collaborative planning and in the delegation of responsibilities and the department is efficiently managed, despite the lack of a subject base.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching challenges students most effectively.
- Standards are well above average in all years and are especially high in Year 11.
- Leadership inspires students.
- Opportunities for ICT work in lessons are limited.

### Commentary

77. Students reach standards which are well above average by the ends of Years 9 and 11. The results of GCSE examinations are consistently very high with most students obtaining A\* and A grades. These very high standards have been maintained, despite substantially increased numbers of students on courses. Students enter the school with very good literacy skills, a sure foundation for the development of historical skills, and they build upon them well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is very good.
78. By the end of Year 9, students have acquired a deep knowledge of the topics they study. They evaluate evidence, taking note of chronology and the relative significance of causative factors. Their greatest strength is the ability to express their arguments in writing, at length and convincingly, although they do not always exploit evidence from sources as fully as possible. A very few students need more help to develop their vocabulary and written expression. By the end of Year 11, students organise essays very well, marshalling a wide range of evidence. This skill ensures that coursework is very well done. Students are able to research topics independently, using both books and the Internet.

79. The quality of teaching is very good and much is excellent. Teachers have thorough subject knowledge and skilfully build lessons around students' contributions from homework, class work and discussion. Challenge is incorporated into most lessons in various ways. For instance, a question of A-Level difficulty used in Year 9 lessons was skilfully broken down by teachers in order to help students use and organise their knowledge to answer it well. In all lessons, independent judgements are fostered. Students' GCSE examination work is marked very well but marking is not quite so consistent in Years 7-9. Helpful comments are not so common at this stage. Teachers' enthusiasm stimulates interest and motivates students most successfully.
80. The curriculum is enriched by a range of challenging extra-curricular activities which include Year 8 adopting the role of MPs for a day and visits to Canterbury and the First World War battlefields. In Years 10 and 11 students are encouraged to read and review historical accounts and biographies, thus extending their knowledge and sharpening their critical faculties. They are competent at word-processing and website research but have little opportunity to develop their ICT skills further. The head of department has established an ethos of enthusiastic achievement. Teachers are highly committed and generous with their time and help. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. High standards have been extended and maintained, assessment has been developed and a very distinctive ethos created.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are well above national averages.
- Teaching is consistently very good.
- The range of skills developed in the subject challenges students to reach high levels of achievement.
- Curriculum provision for the non-GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 does not fully meet the statutory requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.
- There are limited opportunities for students in years 7 to 9 to learn through visits and visitors and the use of ICT.

### Commentary

81. Standards at GCSE are consistently well above national averages. A significant proportion of students are awarded the very highest grades of A\* and A. This is an improving trend which has been maintained as the numbers of students choosing the subject has increased. Standards in coursework are very high.
82. The majority of students, who do not take the subject for GCSE, follow a basic course in religious education. It was not possible to judge standards in the inspection as this is a course based mainly on discussion and there were no lessons to be observed. Time allocations for the subject in Years 10 and 11 fall well below the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.
83. Standards in the current Year 9 are well above average. Students' knowledge and understanding of religion is very secure and they can apply this to everyday life. For example, in the light of their learning about Buddhist teaching on suffering, students are able to research, analyse and evaluate the issue.
84. Overall, achievement across Years 7 to 9 is very good for all students. They develop a mature ability to reflect on their own experience and to analyse beliefs and values. They show both curiosity and respect in their exploration of religion. The work of GCSE students also represents very good achievement. Building on their earlier learning, they are skilled in



recognising diversity and commonality in Jewish belief and practice and in attitudes to the Holocaust.

85. In the lessons seen, the quality of teaching and learning in religious education was very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They challenge students through probing questions and developing the full range of skills in the subject. A good variety of tasks are set to assess the standards required in the Agreed Syllabus. Resources are used well although there is a lack of first-hand experience in the subject in Years 7 to 9, for example, through visits and visitors. The department lacks a good supply of religious artefacts and there are insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT.
86. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear understanding of development needs. The new member of staff is making a very good contribution to the subject. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Further development is needed in the curriculum for all students in Years 10 and 11 and in the opportunities for students in Years 7 to 9 to benefit from visits, visitors, artefacts and ICT.

## Latin

Provision in Latin is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sensitive and enthusiastic teaching leads to very high standards and very good achievement.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very positive.
- Very effective leadership and management ensure a well-planned and appropriate curriculum.

### Commentary

87. Work seen early on in the academic year confirms that standards are well above average at the end of Year 9. Students' understanding of Latin develops at a good pace and they become increasingly confident in their understanding of its forms and structures. By the end of Year 11, their understanding has increased greatly and their extensive vocabulary enables them to attain a very high standard in both language and literature. GCSE examination grades achieved in recent years have been consistently very high; this represents very good achievement for these students.
88. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' excellent knowledge of their subject and their obvious enjoyment of it promotes Latin well amongst the students. The teachers plan for progression in students' learning very well. They have high expectations of what students are able to achieve, and the very good relationships between teachers and students lead to sensitive teaching which produces a very enjoyable and productive experience for all learners. For their part, students bring to lessons a strong work ethos and a keen desire to learn; this consolidates a very profitable teacher-student partnership which promotes consistently high quality learning. Regular assessment and monitoring are beginning to become an in-built feature of the programme and this is intended to lead to regularly identified targets for development to raise standards even more.
89. Since the last inspection development planning and monitoring have become more effective and assessment is becoming incorporated as a useful tool for tracking students' progress. The departmental development plans now link with the school improvement plan. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good teaching with very high expectations in Years 7 to 11.
- Standards are well above average, and examination results are excellent.
- Very good use is made of assessment and target setting in Years 10 and 11.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Computer aided design and manufacture (CAD CAM) is not as well developed across all subjects as it should be.
- The curriculum is narrow in Years 7 to 9.
- There are few (and no vocational) option choices in Years 10 and 11.

#### Commentary

90. Examination standards, which fell slightly in 2002, are still excellent in full and half courses. Results have risen slightly in 2003. Students do slightly less well in design and technology than they do in their other subjects overall, possibly due to frequent staff changes. Although there are differences in performance in different subjects, standards are excellent overall. Assessments made by teachers at the Year 9 show that standards have been consistently very high. The department is currently developing new assessment procedures with the intention of making their judgements even more secure.
91. The standards of work seen in Year 9 were very high. As students' attainment upon entry is average and they have had very varied prior experiences, their achievements are very good. Standards of presentation, including the use of ICT, are very good, but students' sketching skills are not sufficiently well developed. Students use tools and processes safely and can mark out and cut materials accurately. They understand and can use a wide range of mechanisms. They make electronic circuits and model them competently using ICT, but do not yet design their own circuits. In graphics they develop excellent standards; they produce 'busy pages' of design ideas, and utilise computer aided design and manufacture (CAD CAM) to develop their work but this is not used widely enough in all areas.
92. The standards of work seen in Year 11 were excellent and achievement continues to be very good. Students utilise ICT to enhance work, but as in Key Stage 3, the application of CAD CAM to designing and making is not sufficiently developed, especially for a school with technology college status. Students model and modify their designs, and use flow-charts to model processes where appropriate. They understand the implications of industrial processes and achievement is better when they have clients in mind when undertaking project work. The overall quality of making is excellent because of the attention to detail and high standard of finish. Students of all abilities make equally good progress.
93. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. In all years, students are managed very well and benefit from very knowledgeable teachers. They respond to very high expectations. One third of teaching seen in Years 7 to 9 was excellent. In an excellent graphics lesson, students were encouraged to use CAD CAM to design and enhance travel games. Product analysis, where used, helps students to focus their own ideas. Some activities are limited by large group sizes. Homework effectively reinforces learning. In Years 10 and 11, students engage in a range of challenging activities because teachers plan well. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good and they apply themselves equally to theoretical, practical and design work and lesson pace is maintained. In a very good systems and control 'mechanisms' lesson, students investigated a range of folding chairs and

developed their own ideas by modelling them in card and considered standard components before embarking on the making process. Marking and assessment are very good. Students are given meaningful targets for improvement but are not involved enough in the risk assessment process or in intellectual discussion.

94. The department is managed very well by a newly-appointed head of department. Clear priorities have been identified which consolidate the developments in accommodation and resources since the last inspection. Limited accommodation still restricts the option choice in Years 10 and 11, and there is currently no vocational option. Information and data are now used to good effect. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is narrow and opportunities for design are limited in some areas. Excellent technician staff support teaching and learning. They contribute to lesson pace, and to health and safety in the classroom.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and well above at the end of Year 11.
- The quality of teaching is excellent throughout the school.
- Relationships are excellent and all students feel supported in their work.
- Excellent extra-curricular visits to galleries of national and international reputation provide high quality and relevant learning experiences.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are very positive.
- Use of ICT is underdeveloped in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Careers advice is not up to date and this disadvantages some students.

#### **Commentary**

95. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Procedures for gathering assessment data are sharper and better used by teachers. This is beginning to contribute more effectively to students' progress. However, parents are not informed clearly enough in the annual reports about how the grades and marks awarded relate to the National Curriculum levels.
96. The standards of work seen in Year 9 were above national expectations. Given that many students enter Year 7 with a wide disparity of experience in areas such as painting, ceramics, printmaking and 3-dimensional work, this shows very good achievement. Students effectively use a wide range of media, including graded pencils, fabrics, paint, modelling and construction materials. They develop very good levels of specialist subject vocabulary and use it effectively when evaluating their own work and that of established artists. Most have a good knowledge of a wide range of artists and movements, from different times and cultures, such as the Surrealists, Cubists and Impressionists, as well as more contemporary artists such as Bridget Riley, Vasarely and Henry Moore. In lessons, students know exactly what is expected of them because teachers communicate clearly their high expectations and give constant unambiguous verbal feedback. This augments the formal written assessments, which students now receive at the end of each project. There are insufficient opportunities for students to generate imagery using computers at Key Stage 3. Design and craft skills are very well developed in Year 8 where students make a wide range of products, such as pottery vessels and jewellery in the style of the Ancient Aztecs. They also design and make high quality hats, based on different countries and cultures, ancient and modern.
97. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are significantly above average. This was reflected in the GCSE examination results in 2002. All those who entered gained the higher A\*-C grades.

This excellent achievement has been sustained since the last inspection. Students make very good use of sketchbooks to complete homework tasks. They research the lives of artists, practice drawing skills and make annotated sketches which they develop in lessons and incorporate into larger finished works. Students are articulate when critically evaluating their own work in relation to that of selected artists. They benefit greatly from observing at first hand great works when visiting national galleries such as the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert and Tate Modern. The school also organises visits to international venues such as New York, Barcelona, St. Petersburg and Moscow. A few students use digital photography and computers to scan, modify and print their own imagery as a basis for larger finished works. Careers advice is not up to date and students are not made fully aware of the wealth of prestigious opportunities available for high quality art and design graduates.

98. The quality of teaching is excellent which explains why examination results are well above average. Teachers provide very good role models. They constantly challenge students to accept more responsibility for their own learning. They encourage creative problem-solving and most students can correct a misjudged line, colour application or composition and turn it into an expressive feature of their work. The technician plays a key role in supporting learning and makes a positive contribution to the success of the subject. The quality and content of displays are outstanding. This effectively extends the learning environment and plays a significant part in the promotion of the school in the wider community. The quality of leadership is excellent. There are clear organisational practices and harmonious relationships throughout the department.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are very high.
- Teaching is very good, with touches of excellence, inspiring students to learn well.
- Music making beyond lessons is excellent and is a strength of the school.
- Greater use of computers for music is needed in all years.
- Accommodation is barely satisfactory.

## **Commentary**

99. Standards are very high. Students' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 based on assessments made by teachers is well above average. GCSE examination results year on year place all students within A\*-C, most gaining A\* or A grades, well above the national average. Performance is the key. Many students enter the school with well-developed instrumental skills and achievement subsequently is very good at every level of ability. Thus every year has a few very accomplished performers, many on two or three instruments, as well as other confident musicians. Enthusiasm and high aspirations are very evident. The studious and mature attitudes of all students lead to very good achievement in listening, appraisal and composition. Strengths are in the early development by nearly all students of good keyboard facility, the use of notation, aural skills and, in Years 10 and 11, the skill of pastiche composition. While there is some computer-aided work, few students in any year can show facility with this.
100. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers plan very well, have high expectations and present challenges to individual students according to their potential. They engage all students, maintaining very good relationships. They show what music means to them and encourage all. Questioning is a particular strength. Rarely obvious, it probes deeply, sometimes catches students unawares and is skilled in reminding students what they already know or can deduce. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skill and use assessment very well to track progress and to adapt tasks to improve achievement. They do

not, however, sufficiently encourage the use of computer-based music-making, reflecting current practice in the wider world, and providing a tool for less accomplished students. They are not confident in its use themselves.

101. Leadership and management of music is very good. The head of music works closely within the school's policies and priorities for development. She works very hard to manage the remarkable amount of high quality extra-curricular activity, trying to satisfy a demand that she has done much to create. A notable strength is the effective use of the current accommodation and of staff, including 15 visiting teachers. Because of time constraints there is only limited contact with agencies beyond school to support new initiatives such as the use of ICT and a greater representation of non-western music.
102. Since the previous inspection, standards at Year 9 have improved, those at GCSE maintained at their high level with many more candidates, and extra-curricular activity has expanded. Accommodation remains barely satisfactory and restricts opportunities for teachers and students. Fund-raising has started for a well-planned new music building. Overall progress since the last inspection has been good.

## **Drama**

103. Work in drama was sampled. In the few lessons seen the quality of teaching and learning was good and the standards of work were above average. Courses are well organized. Students' evaluative skills are well advanced but the physical aspects of drama are undeveloped.
104. Standards attained for drama in GCSE examinations are above average. Students enjoy their drama lessons and make good progress in the lower school. A special strength is students' intellectual understanding of the drama medium and their thoughtful approach to practical work. However, more focused teaching of the physical elements of performance and development of acting skills is needed for students to realise fully the creative experience of every aspect of drama. The quality of teaching is good because lessons are very well organised, which enables teaching to make the very best use of time. Relationships are also very good which means that students are keen to help one another and work effectively with their teacher who has very good knowledge of course and examination requirements. Students show that they can work together very well. They are perceptive but fair in the evaluation of one another's work. The subject has established itself well since the last inspection and progress has been good. The studio is being put to good use.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is consistently very good and sometimes excellent.
- Standards are high.
- Students are committed and enthusiastic.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- There are no opportunities for students to take GCSE examinations.

### **Commentary**

105. Standards at the end of Year 9 in 2002 based on assessments made by teachers were well above average. Standards seen in lessons during the inspection indicate that in the present Year 9 and Year 11 standards are above average overall, with a significant number of students attaining standards that are well above average. The school does not offer physical education as an examination subject at GCSE.

106. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Students come from a large number of primary schools and their attainment varies considerably when they enter the school. Students in Year 7 are already making very good progress in hockey, netball and dance. Students continue to progress well in Years 8 and 9. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 although students still receive only two periods of physical education each week.
107. The quality of teaching is very good across the department. In some lessons it is excellent. Many opportunities are provided for students to work in close co-operation with others in discussing, planning and evaluating their work. This approach is a strong feature in all lessons and helps to promote students' understanding. Another key strength lies in the teachers' consistently high expectations. Linked to their expertise and thoughtful planning this results in learning of a very high order. Students respond very positively in all lessons. They work with a sense of commitment and enjoyment. Their level of dedication, both in and out of lessons, is an important factor in the standards achieved.
108. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. A system of baseline assessment has been introduced and assessment procedures generally, including an element of student self-assessment, have been strengthened. Whilst indoor accommodation remains limited, the recently opened artificial surface adds an important new dimension to the outdoor facilities available.
109. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are experienced, totally committed, and very enthusiastic. They work extremely well as a team and are mutually supportive. Whilst some students receive leadership training, there are no opportunities at present for interested students to take any public examinations or to study for qualifications such as the junior sports leader's award. The use of ICT to extend learning is limited, but there are plans to increase the use of computers in lessons where appropriate.
110. Supported by several other colleagues, the physical education staff provide an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. These make an important contribution to the standards achieved. Earlier this year, the junior hockey team reached the national finals, whilst the junior netball team and the intermediate athletics team are current national champions. Other district and county successes relate to cross-country, swimming and football. Many clubs are open to all. Activities such as the improvers' swimming group provide opportunities for lower attaining students to develop their skills. The department plans to extend these opportunities whenever possible. The involvement of older students in helping with activities outside lessons is impressive. The school received the sportsmark gold award in 2002.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **Personal, social and health education**

Provision in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is **good**.

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

- There is a coherent, well organised programme of activities.
- Good use is made of outside agencies.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent.

#### **Commentary**

111. There is a well-planned programme for PHSE taught by form tutors. The programme has strong features such as the use of video material, visiting speakers and links with a wide range of organisations, such as the police and health agencies. Members of the sixth form are trained to contribute to the sex and drugs awareness aspects of the programme and this peer education is valued by the students.

112. The school's approach to the teaching of PHSE has changed recently. The programme is being taught by tutors in order to give them more time with their groups but there is inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning in this programme across the tutor groups and this subject is less well taught than others in the school.

## **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Preparatory work undertaken by the co-ordinator is very thorough.
- The many learning activities beyond the normal curriculum are very effective.
- The school is not yet ready to report to parents on each student's achievement.
- Consciousness of the subject is not yet high enough among *all* students and teachers.

## **Commentary**

113. The elements of citizenship are embedded in the school's aims and ethos. However, the school is late in establishing formally the new statutory requirements. There is insufficient evidence to judge standards of attainment, since very little work is yet available to be assessed. Tasks for assessment in citizenship are identified in PSHE, English, geography, history and religious studies. Some work was seen from a Year 9 project on actual urban re-development, nearing its conclusion. Achievement related to assessed tasks is also not possible to judge yet, though students responded very well to this project and to a PSHE lesson on how to resolve conflict.
114. Teaching and learning was good overall in the few lessons seen where citizenship played a major part in learning. The development of skills of enquiry and of communication is evident in teaching and learning across the school. This should be identified wherever it occurs as valuable for achievement in citizenship. The strength of provision is in learning activities beyond the normal curriculum. Senior managers give good support in enabling these to take place. Visits and visitors involve students learning, for example, about Parliament, United Nations, NATO, EEC Magistrates Courts or environmental issues. Students write evaluations of these experiences. The very good range and extent of interaction with the community helps to develop the skills of participation and responsible action of those students involved. A school council – known as Student Voice – is democratically elected and meets regularly, with sixth form students as chair and secretary. Changes in some important issues have been agreed in response to requests and after discussion with senior managers. Representatives find little interest from the majority of students. They need support from all tutors to make effective learning from experience of how democratic systems operate. One opportunity missed is for student representatives to be involved in governors' business, perhaps as participant observers. A few students become involved in some staff appointments.
115. Leadership and management are good. The newly established co-ordinator, who has other responsibilities in school, has worked hard to conduct the necessary audit of all curriculum subjects, relate to outside agencies and to provide some briefing to teachers. She has some clerical help and time to monitor teaching. Schemes are detailed, with the programmes of study clearly identified in PSHE and in all other subjects. Work emerging from teaching in the subjects above is considered a pilot project, to be extended to some others after a review. Geography and history could act as good examples. Systems for tracking progress and attainment, and reporting these to parents, must now include this subject, taking into account all sources of learning.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	9	100	92.5	77.8	47.2	51.1	41
Biology	5	100	83.5	100	36.1	60	34.6
Economics	15	100	86.8	60	45	47.3	38.2
English Literature	6	100	94.9	66.7	38.7	48.3	39.4
French	6	100	85.5	66.7	35.1	46.7	35
Geography	5	100	89.6	100	41.3	60	38.2
German	8	100	88.6	50	35.6	45	36.2
History	9	100	92	55.6	38.9	46.7	38.4
Mathematics	9	88.9	78	44.4	37.3	41.1	33.3
Physics	5	100	87.7	40	42.8	44	38.1

### *Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	12	100	96.7	100	52.3	110	87.8
Biology	41	100	92.6	80.5	38.7	106.8	76.3
Chemistry	48	100	95.1	85.4	49.2	107.1	83.8
Classical studies	8	100	99.3	87.5	56.3	105	90.9
Drama	12	100	98.6	83.3	44.4	106.7	84.6
Economics	25	100	96.6	92	48.2	109.6	84.7
English literature	36	100	98.7	69.4	44.1	102.8	84.7
French	16	100	96.4	68.8	46.1	100	83.2
General studies	95	98.9	91	72.6	30.2	98.1	70.5
Geography	19	100	97.9	84.2	47.3	109.5	85.3
German	8	100	96.7	87.5	44.5	112.5	82.3
History	28	100	97.4	67.9	43.3	99.3	82.6
Mathematics	33	97	95	90.9	56.4	108.5	88.3
Physics	17	100	95.4	88.2	50	112.9	84.6
Religious studies	9	100	96.7	88.9	44.5	104.4	82.8



## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the AS-level examinations are above average and are consistently well above average at A-Level.
- Students' achievement is very good, their writing is mature and characterised by a distinctive personal style.
- Teachers share their considerable subject knowledge, enthusiastically encouraging students to learn independently.
- Students' discussion skills are well developed at AS-Level and are outstanding at A-Level.
- The subject is well managed by an inspirational teacher challenging students to make their best efforts.
- The limited library stock does not help to develop a wider range of reading.
- Access to computers is limited to develop skills for oral presentations.

#### Commentary

116. Above average standards are obtained in the AS-level examinations and in response to very good teaching matched to their needs, A-Level students achieve very good results by the end of their courses. Teachers' very skilful questioning techniques engage students in ongoing analysis focused on the deeper understanding of literary texts. As a result, students' speaking skills develop well during the AS-level courses and A-Level students sustain complex arguments with confidence and style. Older students share these skills and due to their initiative a well supported debating club meets regularly and enters for junior as well as prestigious senior competitions. Students at AS-level improve the quality of their written work through constant re-drafting in response to teachers' constructive marking. A-Level students meet the challenge of increasingly difficult tasks with growing maturity. They analyse a variety of techniques used by writers and explain the impact of these different styles on a range of audiences. The standard of work seen was well above average.
117. Students express their own and alternative points of view succinctly and explain the conclusions they have drawn from clues in the text. Students apply this learning to their personal writing which empowers them with sophisticated strategies for constructing effective essays. The overall quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers share their considerable subject knowledge, enthusiastically encouraging students to think for themselves. Consequently, students develop as independent learners and the quality of their writing shows consistent improvement since the last inspection. Overall, the strongly led department is managed well and students spoke appreciatively of the support and guidance they receive. However, students do not experiment enough with different forms of oral presentations using the ICT facilities available and the library stock does not meet the intellectual needs of students on A-Level courses.

### Modern foreign languages

Overall the provision in French and German is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is always good or very good.
- Students are committed and fully engaged in the work in lessons.
- Students are using the target language successfully and naturally in pair work.
- The relationships between teachers and students are very positive.

- Students are not confident when speaking French and German in whole group settings.
- Some students do not have enough understanding and use of basic grammar.

## Commentary

118. Students in Years 12 and 13 achieve high standards in French and German in relation to national figures for all schools for the top two grades at AS and A2. The percentage of students gaining grade A, particularly in French AS is, however, below the school's average percentage. In German AS it is above the school percentage for grade A. The results in A2 French have improved significantly from 2002 to 2003.
119. Students have a very good understanding of the spoken and written language and they are able to write extensively on topics of discussion or literary texts, although there are still some students who make basic errors in grammar. Students make good contributions in speaking when working with a partner and use the language naturally, with interest and with humour. They lack confidence, however, when asked to speak in the whole group setting. They develop their listening skills through the regular listening homework which is usually based on cassette materials provided by the department. The sample of work seen was above average.
120. The numbers choosing to study French and German in the sixth form are good and very few do not complete the course. Clear progress is made in the work in lessons and the more reflective work seen in workbooks, and the level of achievement is high. Students show great commitment to their work and want to succeed. They collaborate well with their peers and the relationship with their teachers is very good and positive.
121. The quality of teaching is very good. The teachers have a very good command of French or German and they use the language naturally in the classroom for explanations and instructions. They use English only when they feel that it is particularly important that the students understand what they have to do or in the analysis of grammatical points. Teachers have high expectations of their students who respond well to these challenges. Teachers plan lessons well and are clear about their objectives. In the lessons seen, however, these objectives were not shared with the students. The pace of lessons is good, but the range of strategies used is limited and students do not get enough opportunities to speak the language in larger groups. A good range of resources is used, including ICT, and the foreign language assistants are also well used to support the students' learning.
122. The change in the school management structure has led to the department having a head of French and one of German rather than an overall head of modern foreign languages. This has an impact upon the profile of the subject in the school and although the two heads of department wish to work together, this has yet to happen regularly. It is also harder to disseminate the very good practice which exists in the language teaching. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to the hard work and the talent of the teachers that the standards and achievement of the students is so high. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## Latin

Provision in Latin is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- High teacher expectations result in high standards.
- Teachers' knowledge of and love for Latin promotes similar feelings in students.
- Encouragement of independent learning ensures that students take considerable responsibility for their own learning.
- Very effective leadership and management contribute to a well planned and appropriate curriculum.
- Numbers of students are inconsistent from year to year and can be very small.

- There is a need for more use of precise target-setting.

## Commentary

123. In Years 12 and 13 standards in Latin are well above average. Students' attainment is well above average and in recent years and in 2002 was high. In 2002, for example, seven of the eight candidates achieved an A or B grade at A-Level. There were no AS-Level entries in 2002. However, in 2003 all AS students achieved an A grade.
124. Students have very good knowledge of the literature they study. Their appreciation begins early in Year 12. For example, a very effective lesson was seen during the inspection when students from Years 12 and 13 worked very well together to establish from Vergil Aeneid Book 2 the main Trojan and the main Greek characters and the associated descriptions. By Year 13, their knowledge of stylistic devices such as similes and transferred epithet is very good and they have become competent at scanning hexameters. They understand and explain the effects of the position of the caesura. Their relative achievement is greater in literature than in language.
125. Students have a good knowledge of Latin grammar and are competent learners of the main linguistic constructions although they do not always immediately recognize the ablative absolute. Generally, most Year 13 students can work out for themselves the tense of most verbs and case endings and can explain uses of the subjunctive. In unprepared translation their approach varies from those who prefer the security of a literal translation to those who translate the gist well into idiomatic English.
126. The quality of teaching is very good. The two teachers' excellent knowledge of the subject and their infectious enthusiasm for it are conveyed unequivocally to the students who bring very positive attitudes and application to their studies. Students develop a taste for independent learning and become very responsible for their own learning. The teachers' high expectations lead to high quality detailed learning.
127. The current head of department took up post a year ago. A good quality handbook has been produced and the two teachers are working closely together: this ensures consistency in presentation which works to the advantage of the students. The teachers complement each other well. The students enjoy Latin and agree that 'Latin is fun' whilst maintaining rigour. Numbers of Year 13 students have varied from three to eleven in the last four years. If the department continues to attract sufficient students as in the current Year 12 and these students progress to A-Level it is now well placed to build on its strengths and return even higher standards.

## MATHEMATICS

The inspection covered pure mathematics with applications to mechanics and statistics, which form the components of A-Level mathematics and further mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-Level mathematics and further mathematics are very popular subjects.
- Students are very successful and many leave to read mathematics and associated subjects at university.
- Students' excellent work habits, applied to coherent courses, contribute to the very high standards.
- Teaching is very good but provides insufficient opportunities to stimulate in-depth mathematical thinking, beyond routines.

## Commentary

128. The mathematics department provides very well for students. Results are well above those attained nationally for all schools; virtually all students are successful, with over 80 per cent achieving A or B grades at A-Level. Overall students do comparatively better in mathematics than in their other A-Level subjects and their achievement is very good.
129. The standard of work seen reflects this attainment. Notable features are excellently maintained files, which provide well for revision, and the depth of understanding students reveal orally. From the beginning of Year 12, students achieve highly because they can draw readily upon very sound GCSE knowledge. Success with initial A-Level modules accounts for students' confidence together with knowledge at their finger-tips, evident in Year 13 lessons. This was illustrated well when understanding of the manipulation of trigonometric formulae and calculus skills facilitated rapid and purposeful evaluation of complex integrals.
130. Teaching is very good. Universally, teachers carefully phrase questions to develop understanding. An application of the normal distribution function successfully stimulated statistics students. Their comprehension developed rapidly through a well-planned discussion of techniques to analyse waiting times in a queue. Because students are conversant with the highest course expectations and take significant responsibility for their own learning, they are aware of the standards of their work. Teachers do not generally support this by assessing their written work.
131. There is a lack of variety in approaches to lessons; students contribute to lessons well, but this is typically limited to responses to teachers' questions, about techniques or the next step of a solution. Students in Year 12 achieved well in small groups when discussing a mechanics problem but are not familiar with this approach. The use of ICT in lessons by students is limited, but very appropriate.
132. Mathematics teachers are very responsive to students' needs. Very good relations between students and teachers form the foundation for enjoyment and popularity of mathematics at the school. Excellent support on an individual basis is readily available and empathic professional guidance is provided in the weekly lunchtime clinic. Particularly talented students enthusiastically respond to early entry opportunities, some are offered the chance to follow additional modules.
133. The department is very well managed. All six mathematics teachers are engaged with sixth form lessons; they are an excellent team. A particular strength is the liaison between the pairs, or for further mathematics, the three teachers, working with each group. Students enjoy working with different teachers and benefit from their detailed planning which ensures continuity. Since the last inspection the proportion of A and B grades has risen to a very high figure.

## SCIENCE

Chemistry was the focus of the inspection of science but biology and physics are also taught at AS and A-Level.

### Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are consistently very high.
- Student numbers are increasing and retention rates are very high.
- Teaching is very good overall, and resources are used very effectively.

- Students' attitudes are excellent and they are very positive about the course.
- Leadership and management are good, and the sharing of good practice is now established.
- There is a declining trend in the proportion of students gaining the higher grades.
- The use of a central database for the recording, access and analysis of assessment information is not well developed.
- There is insufficient use of ICT by students.

## Commentary

134. Chemistry is taught to AS-Level in Year 12 and to A-Level in Year 13. Retention rates are high and students remain for the duration of the course. The great majority of students are from the main school and they have attained higher grades in chemistry at GCSE. A few students from other schools have joined the groups in the sixth form and there is no significant difference in their achievements.
135. Standards are consistently very high and the proportion of students gaining the higher grades in external examinations at the end of Year 13 is well above the national average. Typically, this proportion of students has been about twice the national figure. In 2003, four out of five students attained grades A or B. However, there has been a significant and continuing decline in the proportion of students gaining these grades since 2000. All students are successful in the range of grades from A to E. In comparison with their peers in the school, sixth form students of chemistry are more successful than those doing physics and not as successful as those in biology.
136. The standard of work seen during the inspection is well above average, and achievement is also mostly very good. In Year 12 students have good knowledge of atomic structure and a developing understanding of molar mass and stoichiometry. In volumetric analysis, they show competence in doing titrations safely and talk about their work with confidence. Students in Year 13 also have good recall of aliphatic and aromatic reaction mechanisms, others demonstrate their clear understanding of the chemistry of nitriles and of the products of reduction and hydrolysis.
137. The quality of teaching in chemistry in both years in the sixth form is very good. The style of teaching includes didactic delivery and a modest range of other strategies. Levels of challenge and expectation are high. Lesson planning and laboratory organisation are very well done and resources are used effectively. Health and safety issues are emphasised and the frequent use of focused questions in all lessons helps students to learn.
138. Leadership and management of chemistry are good. Supported by the head of department, teachers promote very high standards of commitment and behaviour, and students' engagement and productivity are excellent. All teachers have an outstanding knowledge and understanding of chemistry, and bring a range of experience to their teaching. Good practice is willingly shared and presentation material is banked and available to all. Guided by staff, students' folders are exceptionally well organised and contain detailed and useful notes. Teachers are very positive role models and their enthusiasm is reflected in the attitude and work of students.
139. Since the appointment of the head of chemistry in 2001, there has been an improvement in the way chemistry is organised and taught. New schemes of work have been developed and, together with additional texts and resources, these arrangements support learning well. However, the recording and reporting of students' progress and achievement are not yet on the school subject database and there is not enough use of ICT in lessons by students. Chemistry is a very popular subject and the number of students wanting to study it is increasing. Given the opportunity, all students would choose it again. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **History**

Provision in history is **excellent**.

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

- Students obtain a well above average proportion of A/B grades in AS and A2 examinations.
- Students respond enthusiastically to challenging and stimulating teaching.
- Leadership and management are outstanding and there are no weaknesses.

#### **Commentary**

140. Standards are well above average in lessons and examinations. Students achieve very well. The proportion of A/B grades in examinations is not only well above average in 2003 but has been consistently so over time and despite increased numbers. Similar standards are apparent in lessons. Students have a very good depth of knowledge and understanding which helps them develop a wide perspective. In both written and oral work, they use a range of historical evidence to support their arguments. By the end of Year 13, essay writing skills are well developed and an extensive, and sometimes sophisticated, vocabulary employed. Standards of technical presentation such as bibliography and foot-notes, are very high.
141. The quality of teaching is very good and much is excellent. Students respond immediately to the challenge of the essay assignment required to enter Year 12. The critical review of a biography appeals to them and good work results. Teachers have an excellent range of specialist knowledge but they are also skilled in presenting the detailed information and ideas necessary whilst involving the students in discussion. Students are always encouraged to form independent study habits and to work effectively as a group. Written work is very carefully marked with clear guidance for improvement. Target grades are constantly monitored so students understand their own progress. Teachers are generous with extra help in lunchtime clinics.
142. Unusually, the AS and A-level syllabuses are completely different from the GCSE examination one and the students appreciate the breadth of this provision. They are excited when they are able to trace themes through various periods. The Year 13 curriculum benefits from the history of philosophy course that challenges and deepens understanding of the development of historical thought and themes. It also incorporates an advanced extension certificate. Several students now enter essays for a history prize awarded by a Cambridge college. It is a very good preparation for university, both generally and specifically. Leadership of the department is outstanding because it has created such a strong ethos of aspiration, ambition and achievement. All teachers contribute to this and, as a result, history is now a popular choice. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The examination results of a larger group have improved significantly and the quality of education offered is excellent.

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

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

- Very good teaching promotes very good learning.
- Very good guidance encourages students to do well.
- Very good fieldwork enriches students' learning.
- The pace and challenge in some lessons are insufficient.

## Commentary

143. Standards are above average at AS-Level and well above average at A-Level. Achievement overall is very good.
144. Students in year 12 use their prior knowledge applying their mapping and analytical skills to current work so extending their knowledge and understanding. They use advanced subject vocabulary with growing confidence. Most students are not put out when confronted with geographical models and confidently adapt these to show variations, for example, in the transference of specific minerals within biomes. The growth in confidence keeps pace with achievement. The over-dependence by a minority of students on handouts provided by teachers compromises achievement, as notes made are insufficient for revision purposes. Most students, however, are conscientious in compiling information and write well. Standards remain above average at the end of Year 12 and are sustained into Year 13 as seen in the well thought out in-depth oral and written explanations of students. The excellent fieldwork produced by students in support of their extended essays is also a good summation of their gains in knowledge and understanding and their acquisition of skills. Students make good use of ICT throughout their post 16 courses. Students are anxious to do well and gain considerably in self-knowledge through opportunities to evaluate their own and others' work.
145. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this builds confidence in their students. Teachers' planning is very good and a lot of thought goes into consolidating student learning and providing guidance about improvement. Students certainly express an appreciation of the guidance provided. Questioning probes understanding and makes students think. In the best lessons teachers used student answers to extend knowledge and so deepen understanding. Teachers encourage students in the use of ICT but make little use of the resources available to enhance their teaching. Mindful of the need not to over-direct learning, teachers provide opportunities for independent work allowing students to use their own initiative and have the chance to exchange ideas. Teachers use these opportunities to provide one-to-one guidance and monitor progress. However, the pace of independent working is sometimes too slow and not all the work provided for students is particularly challenging, especially at AS-Level.
146. The expertise and enthusiasm of the subject leader have sustained high standards over time and inspire confidence in colleagues and students. Management is very good and all the appropriate resources are available to support teaching and learning. ICT resources, however, are not a permanent feature in subject rooms. Teamwork is evident, as is collaborative planning. The provision and design of fieldwork is outstanding. The consideration of student personal development, as well as academic success, through such learning is commendable. Recruitment to AS-Level is good with two good size groups and retention to A-Level is one hundred percent. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

### Design and technology

Provision in Product Design (Graphics with Materials) is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, teaching and learning are very good.
- Standards in examinations and in work seen are well above average.
- The course is well planned to meet the needs of students.
- Students are only just starting to apply CAD CAM to their work.

## Commentary

147. In 2002, standards for the small number of students in the first year of AS-Level examinations in design and technology were well above average. Students' performance was broadly in line with their performance in their other subjects but a little below that expected from their prior attainment. As a result of school policy, these students have not continued to A-Level.
148. In the current Year 12, work seen is well above average and some is excellent. Students have already developed a clear grasp of the influence of past design movements. They show that they can present and communicate their ideas very clearly, and generate interest from their audience. Students rapidly acquire knowledge about materials and the skills and processes needed to manipulate them for project work. They are able to learn from an intelligent analysis of each other's work. Students are just starting to use computer aided design and manufacture (CAD CAM) to develop their designs, but they make good use of ICT otherwise. Overall, students have made rapid progress on the course so far and have achieved very well.
149. Two product design lessons were seen and students' work reviewed. In an excellent lesson students were encouraged to think about form and function within the context of past design styles, and hence develop the aesthetic and practical value of their own excellent ideas. They designed with an end user or 'client' in mind and this helped them focus clearly upon design requirements. Very good assessment at the end of a unit of work means that all students know exactly how they have done and how they can improve. Challenges set by teachers are at an appropriately high level.
150. Students are enthusiastic about the course. Those interviewed felt that they were well advised before their sixth form studies, and were glad they took this option, some with career choice or higher education in mind. They all intend to continue their studies to A Level next year. Students feel well supported by committed and approachable teachers, who are always available. They feel that their progress has been well monitored and they are given clear feedback and detailed targets for improvement.
151. The course is very well managed by the newly-appointed head of department. It has been well structured and planned since its inception in 2002, and sets challenges at an appropriately high level. A measured approach means that the course builds upon courses in Years 10 and 11, recognising any gaps in students' prior experience. The course is very well supported by teaching and technician staff. Teachers are building links with industry and this should be further developed. Students' work from last year shows that they are well aware of manufacturing constraints and have developed industrial awareness. This is the only post 16 level course in design and technology.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

### Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well qualified, specialist teachers know their students well and provide excellent academic support.
- All students benefit from individual tuition tailored to their needs.
- Excellent leadership in the subject promotes an industrious ethos and harmonious relationships.
- There is no dedicated sixth-form studio base.
- Careers advice is not always appropriate for students wishing to pursue art and design at degree level and beyond.



## Commentary

152. The subject is gaining in popularity at A-Level. Results in 2002 were very high. A hundred per cent of students entered gained the higher A/B grades.
153. Students in Year 12 adapt quickly to sixth-form work and strive for originality. Their very well developed drawing and painting skills enable them to transcribe accurately the images of their 'mind's eye' to paper, board and canvas. They scale-up smaller preliminary sketches and maquettes (model prototypes) into larger well-proportioned paintings and sculptures, using a variety of mathematical techniques and appropriate vocabulary. Standards of work seen were very high.
154. Students in Year 13 spend long hours on coursework out of lessons to gain the higher grades. There is no dedicated sixth-form studio base, which is a constraint when students are working with wet media such as dyes, paints, clay and plaster and has meant that the department has not been able to make progress which is better than satisfactory since the last inspection. Sharing space with whole class groups also prevents students from taking advantage of free times between other lessons to complete coursework assignments. Students are encouraged to work from first-hand experiences. The school provides very good opportunities to work directly from the life model. Students are mature in their approach. Some take extra-curricular evening classes to study the genre in depth. In this respect, one student undertook a high quality personal study of the work of Lucien Freud, producing an illuminating presentation, showing personal painting skills as well as very good knowledge and understanding of the main issues.
155. The many well-planned visits to national and international galleries make a very positive contribution to students' own work and to their extensive cultural understanding.
156. The quality of teaching is excellent and is well supported by the technician who also makes a very good contribution to students' achievement. Teachers regularly hold 1:1 tutorials with students, negotiating future work, through individual learning projects. These are formal written records, drawn up and agreed by both parties. Homework is thoroughly analysed, as is work in sketchbooks and portfolios, so that students know what they need to do to improve. Leadership is excellent. High quality policies and organisational strategies underpin and improve practice.

## Example of outstanding practice

### To show how ICT can be used to extend learning in art in the sixth form

A talented student made extensive use of digital images of domestic utensils, taken outside lessons, which were scanned into a computer. These were then modified by distortion, and enlarged before being printed to form interesting starting points for more personal expressive works. Using references taken from Surrealism, in this case the work of Salvador Dali, the student introduced more emotive, hand drawn imagery, superimposed over the photographic images, to form a composite picture. The resulting multi-layered paintings were rich in complex imagery and intellectual content.

## Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching enables very good achievement.
- Students' attitudes are very positive.
- Insufficient use is made of computer-aided music.

## Commentary

157. Standards are high, though groups are small, as shown in validated results for 1998 and 1999. After three years with no candidates, viable A-Level and AS-level groups have now been re-established. Recent results gave five of six students A or B grades at A-Level and five of eight A or B at AS-Level. Numbers are too small to make valid national comparisons. From work and lessons seen and heard, current students are working at standards to match these. Attitudes are very positive, both towards the tuition they receive and towards each other. With mutual support very evident. This is so for those aiming for a music degree course and for others. Students are well aware of their relative strengths and weaknesses. Achievement is very good, helped by very high standards in performance, abundant self-confidence and maturity. Most use computer programs to compose and, for example to hear their work in harmonising chorales.
158. Teaching is very good, showing high expectations. The engagement and encouragement of students are excellent. Teachers are prepared to experiment with methods, for variety and for even more effective learning. For example, in Year 13 students had to use their aural skills and knowledge of functional harmony to piece together, like a jig-saw, tiny portions of a Bach chorale score. In comparing recorded extracts from widely different periods, Year 12 students showed very good analytical skill, both aurally and in referring to scores. The enthusiasm of teachers creates a buoyant atmosphere for learning. Subject knowledge and skill is very good. Learning is very good because of the high level of participation by students in lessons which resemble seminars or workshops. Teachers should develop more the use of computer-aided learning, for themselves and for students, in preparation for university courses.
159. Leadership and management are both very good. Teachers work together excellently. The department is a community with much activity beyond lessons. Sixth-formers use the music facilities to the maximum, integrating well with younger students and providing good role models. They contribute well to performing groups, taking some responsibility and gaining from this experience. Leaders should consider the advantages of inviting young men to 6<sup>th</sup> form music here.
160. Sixth form music did not feature in the last inspection and it is not possible to make a judgement on progress since that time.

## BUSINESS

### Economics

The provision in economics is **excellent**.

#### Strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above the national average and often very high.
- Teaching is at least very good and often excellent.
- Students make very good progress and develop excellent knowledge and skills.
- The subject is very well managed.
- Students do not use ICT enough in lessons.

## Commentary

161. Overall, standards in lessons and work seen at AS and A-Level are well above the national average. In 2002, results were well above the national average for the top grades of A and B in 2002 and all students passed. In 2003, the proportion of top grades was even higher, with 20 students obtaining an A grade, above students' performance in other school subjects. Students make very good progress and most achieve much better than statistical predictions

based on their GCSE scores. Economics is, additionally, a new subject to students, and this makes their results outstanding. One student won a national economics prize.

162. Standards in lessons and work seen of current Year 12 students are well above national expectations at this stage. Achievement is very good overall. Students' course notes are well organised and very neat, and they define key terms, such as *elasticity*, in good detail. The evaluations of weaker students are insufficiently detailed.
163. Students in Year 13 make very good progress in lessons. Work seen was above average, apart from students' use of ICT to model economic or statistical problems, using spreadsheets, which was limited. However, all students drew clear, well labelled graphs showing supply and demand curves to analyse firms' competitive positions.
164. The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in lessons seen, with one of the two lessons being excellent. The teacher's excellent subject knowledge underpinned enthusiastic class discussions. Lessons had a clear focus and very brisk pace, helping students consolidate previous learning on difficult concepts. Two outstanding features of the teaching can be described. Firstly, using mind-mapping techniques, where all of the ideas involved in the whole module were shown on one poster, the teacher enabled students to understand how concepts could be integrated and applied. Secondly, the teacher had written a study guide for each module, which incorporated data, illustrations, essay questions, revision points and suggested sites for internet research. Discussions, well rooted in the theory contained in the guides, provided ample opportunity for students to engage in animated and constructive discussion through which they reinforced key concepts very well by applying them to topical examples. Lessons contained a good mix of structured activities, combining individual and paired work, with frequent group work presentations. All students worked very well together, developing good communication skills, showing problem solving and effective team working. The teacher's excellent jokey but supportive relationships with students are complemented by very thorough marking that is detailed, constructive and regular. Students are well aware of the progress they have made and further tasks required. Lesson plans and assessment procedures fully meet examining board requirements, as the teacher is an external examiner.
165. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent, and a very clear sense of direction is shown by the well-planned introduction of the new AS and A-Level courses. The department's progress in meeting school improvement targets, through regular subject reviews is very good. Students' progress is very well monitored over time, with their performance continually measured against predicted grades. The subject leader constantly strives to improve techniques and available materials for learning, including those gained from students' visits to places of interest. The department's overall improvement since the last inspection has been very good, with increasingly high standards resulting from consistently high-class teaching.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>1</b>
Pupils' achievement	1	2
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	1	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	2	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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