

INSPECTION REPORT

COLCHESTER ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Colchester

LEA area: ESSEX

Unique reference number: 115359

Headmaster: Mr Kenneth Jenkinson

Lead inspector: Dr Kate Seager

Dates of inspection: 20 – 23 October 2003

Inspection number: 259203

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 students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Male Years 7-11; mixed Years 12-13
Number on roll;	740
School address:	Lexden Road Colchester Essex
Postcode:	CO3 3ND
Telephone number:	01206 509100
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr J G Tillett
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Colchester Royal Grammar School is a relatively small secondary school of 740 students. Up to Year 11, it admits only boys who have passed a selective examination. Almost all remain at the school. It accepts about 25 girls and 25 boys, including 15 male boarders, into Year 12. Its sixth form is larger than many others. About 30 boys are boarders; most are in the sixth form. Several are from British Hong Kong Chinese families.

Students are predominantly white British. The two main minority ethnic groups are students with Chinese and Asian or Asian British heritage. Just under six per cent of students speak English as an additional language, a higher than average proportion; all speak and write English fluently, other than those joining in Year 12 from schools where English is not the language of tuition. Most students are from an above average socio-economic background. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average.

Attainment on entry is significantly above average, particularly in mathematics. Sixteen students, a proportion well below the national average, are identified as having special educational needs. Almost all students stay at the school until 18 and continue to higher education. The school received a Schools Achievement Award in 2002 and a Department for Education and Skills outstanding schools award in 1999.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1995	Dr Kate Seager	Lead inspector	Provision for students with special educational needs
9472	Mr John Edmond	Lay inspector	
2392	Mr Richard Brent	Team inspector	6 th form geography
14871	Mrs Beryl Buteux	Team inspector	English English as a second or additional language
30695	Mrs Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art and design
4426	Mr Terry Fitchett	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
10060	Mr David Gutmann	Team inspector	Economics
2901	Mrs Gulshan Kayembe	Team inspector	Biology
1779	Dr David Leonard	Team inspector	6 th form chemistry and physics
31821	Mr Brian McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
20666	Mr Ian Newton	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics
18846	Mr Philip Priest	Team inspector	Music Citizenship
10392	Mrs Donaleen Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography Religious education
17522	Mr Nigel Stiles	Team inspector	6 th form Latin
2183	Dr Peter Thompson	Team inspector	Design and technology. Information and communication technology (ICT)
10895	Mr David Wasp	Team inspector	History
22691	Mr Raymond Woodhouse	Team inspector	Mathematics

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Much is excellent in this highly effective school. It gives able students an excellent academic education and a wealth of other ways in which they can shine. Prudent financial management enables it to invest an above average cost per student. It provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve very high standards because of the high quality of the teaching.
- The headmaster provides excellent leadership.
- The school promotes excellent relationships, attitudes and behaviour.
- Staff are very generous with their time and provide excellent activities, support and care.
- Not all students in Years 10 and 11 receive their entitlement in information and communication technology (ICT), and the use of ICT is insufficiently developed in several subjects.
- Monitoring, long-term planning and assessment are weaker aspects of a few departments.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen, provision for religious education has improved, and resources and accommodation have been upgraded. The school does not fully meet three of its legal requirements; one was raised in the last report.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		All schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A
Year 13	A/AS level 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 students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is very good. Standards across the school are very high in comparison with the national average. Students' outstanding speaking skills support their learning well. Students achieve very well in almost all subjects by Year 9. Achievement is good between Years 9 and 11. Students achieve very well indeed in the sixth form where the school reached top position nationally for state schools in four of the last five years. The school adds the highest value of all the Essex local authority grammar schools, as it accepts students with a wider ability range but attains the highest results by Year 13.

Students are courteous, diligent and caring. They develop well spiritually through assemblies and opportunities to consider and discuss their beliefs and those of others. Moral and social education is excellent. Students' awareness of the needs of individuals and the wider community are commendable. Very good cultural understanding is extended in subjects, through assemblies, trips and visits abroad. Attitudes, behaviour and attendance are excellent.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides **a very high quality of education with many excellent features.** **Very good teaching overall across the school,** and especially the very high expectations of most teachers, results in a very high quality of learning. Stable staffing and very well qualified teachers are major factors in the school's continuing success. New and refurbished accommodation has improved the learning environment in several subjects.

The academic curriculum suits the able students well. Two legally required aspects are only partially met: the requirements for all students to experience a daily act of collective worship and the teaching and assessing of ICT of all students in Years 10 and 11. Students in Years 10 and 11 who are not following a GCSE course in ICT depend on unco-ordinated opportunities to enhance these skills, so that all do not necessarily cover the required programme of study in other subjects. The students' curriculum is well balanced by very good opportunities for practical and sporting activities, visits and excellent opportunities to challenge able and gifted students. The few students with special educational needs are very well supported. The school provides no formal tuition of English for students joining the school in Year 12 with English as a foreign language; several struggle in the early weeks to follow subjects which require rapid reading and discussion.

Students are especially well cared for in school and in the homely and welcoming boarding houses. Boarders develop very well academically and personally, and become well prepared for adult life. Many students praise the effort made by the school to find them good work placements. Sixth formers receive very good guidance in preparing applications for university.

Information for parents is of a very high quality, though parent consultation is not fully developed. The school deals sensitively and quickly with parents' concerns. Parents support their children's learning well. The school has outstanding links with the local community and effective mechanisms for the transfer of students. All have a positive effect on students' personal development and academic achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headmaster is an excellent leader with a clear vision of what the school should do to help the students achieve even higher standards. Governors with valuable expertise share this vision, guide the school well, challenge managers with a few difficult issues and help them make good decisions. Despite its manifest strengths, governance is just satisfactory because not all legal requirements are met. Management is good. The senior managers have created a school where students succeed and relationships are excellent. Communication at all levels is good. Prudent financial management enables the school to fund what it needs and to maintain sufficient high-calibre teachers and support staff. Pastoral management is very strong. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Many departments are very well run, but monitoring, long-term planning and assessment are weaker aspects of a few, especially English and mathematics. Leadership and management of boarding are very good. Administrative staff ensure efficient day-to-day running of the school.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The overwhelming majority of parents and students greatly appreciate the school, the education it provides, and the significant personal and academic support given by dedicated staff. Parents and sixth formers praise the caring leadership of the headmaster.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things this successful school should do to improve further are to:

- Improve long-term planning and monitoring of teaching and assessment in departments where these are weaker, especially in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that all departments play their part in increasing students' ICT competence.
- Provide some English tuition for Year 12 students with English as an additional language.

and, to meet the following legal requirements:

- Cover and assess the programme of study for ICT with all students in Years 10 and 11.
- Provide a daily act of collective act of worship for all students.

- Register sixth formers in the afternoon.

SIXTH FORM SUMMARY

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a highly effective sixth form, with staff always prepared to go the extra mile. It provides a very good academic curriculum and excellent opportunities to develop personally. The retention rate on courses is excellent. The well above average cost per student provides good value for money.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Articulate, courteous and caring students attain very high standards and achieve very well, often in four or five subjects as well as in sports, music and other activities.
- Teachers with first class subject knowledge and students keen to excel result in teaching and learning of predominantly very high quality.
- The school creates the timetable to enable virtually all to study their chosen subjects.
- Leadership and management are good.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<p>Provision in English is very good. Students reach very high standards in class and in examinations. Achievement is very good. Very good teaching results in students developing an outstanding command of language and the ability to sustain an argument and express an opinion with eloquence and confidence.</p> <p>Provision in French and German is excellent. Standards are exceptionally high and examination results outstanding because of very high quality teaching and learning and lessons consistently conducted in the foreign language.</p> <p>Provision in Latin is very good. Standards are well above the national average and students achieve very well. In the most recent examination all students achieved A or B grades. Teaching and learning are very good; teachers enthuse and challenge students with their very good subject knowledge. Greek results are high; all four candidates gained grades A or B.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Provision is very good. Standards are well above the national average and students achieve very well. In the most recent examination all students achieved A or B grades. Teaching and learning are very good.</p>
Science	<p>Provision in chemistry and physics is very good. Highly motivated students reach very high standards in their work and examinations. Very good teaching and the teachers' enthusiasm and excellent knowledge result in very high achievement by almost all students. Biology was sampled: examination results are also very high.</p>
Information and communication technology	<p>ICT was sampled. Recent examination results in computing are very good compared with the national average. Achievement is very good. Students are keen to learn.</p>

Humanities	<p>Provision in geography is very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good. Very good teaching, supported out of school by the departmental website, combined with the students' enthusiasm, result in a very good learning. The courses are well planned.</p> <p>Provision in history is excellent. Excellent teaching and learning result in very high standards and very good examination results. Students develop very good research skills and have many opportunities to extend their learning.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing.	Design and technology were sampled. Examination results and current standards are well above the national average. Students design and make individual products to a high standard of accuracy and finish. They thoroughly enjoy the course.
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in art is very good and excellent teaching results in very high standards and very good examination results. Students work in a good variety of media and all are challenged to achieve very well.</p> <p>Provision in music is excellent and very good, challenging teaching results in very good achievement. Motivated students have high-level music skills and reach high standards. High proportions gain grades A and B in examinations.</p>
Business	Provision in economics is very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Teachers have excellent and relevant subject knowledge. Teaching and learning are very good.
General education	Almost all sixth formers follow a two-year course in general studies and have significant success at A level; very high proportions gain grades A and B. Students improve their skills of debate and argument and their ability to write structured essays while discussing ethical, moral and contemporary issues
<p><i>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'.</i></p>	

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students are very well known to staff. Pastoral issues are quickly and effectively dealt with. Students receive very good guidance and support in their subjects, for their university applications and for their well-being. Social activities and caring fellow students help both day and boarding students, new to the school, to settle. The school goes to great lengths to arrange appropriate work experience to guide career choice.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are good. A major strength is the monitoring of work to ensure, early in the course, that students have made the right choices. Occasionally, the school links with local schools to provide a few subjects not available or helps an individual student to prepare an examination in a subject not offered.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Most students respond very positively to the sixth form in interviews and questionnaires, and express enormous gratitude for the additional help offered by staff. Above all, they commend the rounded education and the encouragement to participate in so many activities. A very small number expressed concern for a small minority of unsatisfactory teaching.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

1. Standards are very high overall. Boys' results in national tests in Year 9 and GCSE examinations in Year 11 and boys' and girls' results in Year 13 are very high compared with those of all schools nationally. Students' achievement, measured by the progress made, is overall very good. It is very good between Years 7 and 9, good between Years 9 and 11 and excellent between Years 11 and 13. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the few with special educational needs, achieve in line with their peers. In the sixth form overall, girls and boys achieve equally well. The few able students who join the school in Year 12 with English as a second language achieve very well by Year 13 and attain high grades. Year 13 students reach very high standards in all subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are excellent in all A-level subjects.
- Standards across the school are on an upward trend and have improved since the last inspection; the school meets the ambitious targets it sets itself.
- Achievement is excellent in modern languages across the school and in chemistry, history and physics in the sixth form.
- The school provides very well indeed for students with special educational needs.
- The school provides myriad musical, sporting and national and international competitions for its many gifted and talented students.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	44.2 (45.1)	31.9 (31.6)
Mathematics	47.6 (47.6)	34.8 (34.4)
Science	44.3 (45.1)	33.4 (33.2)

There were 100 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. By Year 9 in English, mathematics and science boys reach high standards, compared with selective schools nationally. Boys' achievement between Years 7 and 9 is good in English and very good in mathematics and science.

Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	100 (100)	50 (48)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	57 (n/a)	39.8 (n/a)

There were 102 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

- The boys' average point score is very high. In all GCSE subjects entered the proportion of grades A* and A greatly exceeds the national average. Boys make good progress and achieve well overall between Year 9 and Year 11.

Standards in GCE A/AS level examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002 (2001)

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99 (98)	96 (89)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	84 (69)	42 (36)
Average point score per student	505 (425)	263 (n/a)

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

- Boys and girls attain very high point scores and high proportions of grade As. Boys and girls achieve excellent results overall in relation to their performance at GCSE.
- Major factors in the students' overall very good achievement are high quality teaching, the staff's willingness to provide additional support, the school ethos which makes it 'cool to do well' as one boy put it, and students' good behaviour and attitudes.
- Within this very good overall achievement, the strongest by Year 11 is in modern languages, whereas that in English and design and technology is less strong.
- The few students identified as having special educational needs are well known to staff and very well supported. Most achieve very well. The gifted and talented students push their talents further through the many national competitions, musical opportunities, sporting events and other challenges organised by the school.
- The students' very good oral competence and attentive listening support their learning in all subjects. They are confident in speaking to audiences and in making presentations because of their many opportunities to debate and discuss. Their very strong mathematical ability also supports their learning and understanding in many subjects.
- Although competence in information and communication technology (ICT) is very high by Year 9, thereafter the students who do not follow a GCSE course in ICT do not necessarily develop as wide a range of ICT skills as they might, as the school does not yet ensure that subjects cover all ICT applications. Access to computers, whilst greatly improved, is not always easy and not enough teachers plan to include their use in lessons. Many students, however, develop skills independently, as most, if not all, have a personal computer. Boarders have ready access to the school's network, either in their room or in the school library.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is excellent in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Punctuality is very good. Students' attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is well above the national average. There is no unauthorised absence.
- Students arrive promptly and lessons start on time.
- Attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. Relationships are excellent. Exclusions are minimal.
- Students' spiritual and cultural development is very good and their moral and social development is excellent.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	5.1%
National data	7.8%

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.0%
National data	1.2%

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

10. The above comparisons apply to 2001/02, as national data for 2002/03 are not yet available. There was no unauthorised absence during 2002/03 and the level of authorised absence was virtually unchanged. The measures in force to promote good attendance are excellent and parents are assiduous in ensuring that their children attend regularly. The procedures for recording lateness are effective. Sixth formers are not registered in the afternoon, a breach of requirements.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	619	2	
White – Irish	5		
White – any other White background	6		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1		
Mixed – White and Black African	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	13		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	10		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	6	1	
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	6		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	24		
Any other ethnic group	5	1	

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

11. The friendly and strongly academic atmosphere encourages in students a real enthusiasm to learn and to take part in the extensive range of activities provided. The school's exceptional ethos and its very high expectations of students ensure that behaviour in the classroom and round the school continues to be outstanding. There were only four fixed exclusions last year. During the inspection there was no evidence of bullying, racism or other harassment, and students are wholly confident that the school deals immediately with any such untoward occurrences. The school is very successful in ensuring all races and creeds work and mix well together, and that the boarders are wholly integrated into school life. This leads to exceptional relationships all round. Students' self-esteem is very high. They are articulate and confident and very positive about the school. Students in the main school look smart and sixth-formers are very well turned out.

12. The school places importance on the spiritual dimension of life, demonstrated in the value placed on individual development and the mutual regard and respect shown by all. Students are confident in expressing their feelings and in sharing their ideas. Opportunities for self-evaluation enable them to order their learning and meet challenge. Very well planned and spiritual assemblies allow time to reflect, and in some lessons teachers take time to share their pleasure in what is extraordinary about their subjects and allow time for students to do the same. Lesson plans show some missed opportunities to develop students' spiritual dimension, as at the time of the last inspection.
13. The school's ethos, assemblies and the personal, social and moral programme ensure that moral teaching and social development are firmly in place and are of very high quality. Students are clear about the schools' expectations in both areas. They actively help to ensure that the school works effectively as a community and that the site is kept in pristine condition. Staff make excellent role models.
14. Students develop very good understanding of the richness of their own culture and that of others. They respect and celebrate diversity in very well-planned assemblies and religious education. The positive welcome which the school extends to the Hong Kong Chinese boarders and these boys' own enthusiastic contribution to the life of the school, demonstrate the school's commitment and respect for diversity. Students benefit from studying ancient Roman and Greek cultures, and from the patronage of the Greek Government, which funds a native speaker to teach modern and classical Greek. Students develop a strong musical culture. They appreciate, compose and perform in a variety of genres, including African drumming and North American Jazz, as well as European music. Cultural awareness and respect is well developed through the many well-planned visits to places of worship, musical venues, theatres and museums.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

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

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good, as reported by many parents and students. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Two thirds of teaching, a very high proportion, is very good or excellent.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and very good class control.
- Students listen well and are eager to learn so that they benefit from the high quality teaching.
- A slick pace of teaching and learning results in time being used to the full.
- Stable staffing and a stable student population are major factors of successful learning.
- The school makes very good use of data to set targets and monitor individual students.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in [number] lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
26 (16%)	80 (50%)	38 (24%)	14(9%)	2 (1%)	0	0

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

15. Teaching and learning are very good or excellent in two-thirds of lessons. This quality of teaching is distributed evenly across the school. It is not surprising that students achieve so

well. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge well to challenge all students with questions and tasks to extend their thinking and knowledge. Students absorb information quickly. Excellent behaviour and relationships provide a good atmosphere for learning. A very small amount of over-exuberant behaviour is quickly dealt with and learning resumes. The school is small: teachers know students very well so that they support appropriately the few with specific learning needs and English as a second language. They equally support students experiencing difficulties discreetly and with care. They encourage with praise and treat all students equally well.

16. Activities are well varied in most lessons. In lessons judged only satisfactory, a common feature was a lecturing style, with too little involvement of the students. Most teachers consolidate learning well at the end of the lesson, at times, as in history, with an enjoyable competitive quiz. They consolidate and extend learning further with well-chosen homework.
17. Teaching and learning are good overall in English, and very good in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and Years 12 and 13, and good in Years 10 and 11. In English an occasional ponderous style of teaching, with too little involvement of students, contrasts with an inspirational approach. Teaching in mathematics is good overall, but some teaching lacks flair and explanations are not clear to all in some classes. Teaching and learning are excellent overall in French and German, in art in Years 10 to 13 and in history in Years 12 to 13. Teaching and learning are very good overall in most other subjects. They are good across the school in religious education and in ICT in Years 10 and 11. Latin was lightly sampled. Teaching and learning were good and the boys were enthusiastic, able to work out for themselves the meaning of words and phrases.
18. Assessment is good. A real strength is the very good use of data to set targets, track individual students' progress and indicate where a student is not matching previous performance. A few teachers and departments do not make best use of this information.
19. Teachers mark work regularly. Much marking is good and comments (both oral and written) show students how they can improve. Marking is not consistent in some departments and the school policy is not always applied. It is easier for students to know how well they are doing in Years 10 to 13, as they are aware of progress towards their targeted examination grades. Departments report National Curriculum levels to parents at the end of Year 9, as required, and in some instances more frequently, but few teachers disclose to students the National Curriculum level at which they are working, nor the criteria to reach the next level. This is a pity since these intelligent boys would make good use of the information.

The curriculum

The school's curricular provision is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provides very good challenge for these very able students.
- Opportunities for enrichment are very good.
- In Years 10 to 11 and the sixth form, option choices take excellent account of students' preferences, enabling nearly all to opt for their first choices.
- The legal requirements for teaching and assessing ICT in Years 10 and 11 and the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils are only partially met.
- Provision for the few students with special educational needs is very good.
- There is scope for the school to improve work-related elements within the curriculum.

Commentary

20. A demanding curriculum, which provides a high level of intellectual challenge for students, both in the depth and the breadth of subject matter covered, makes a strong contribution to their very good achievement. Teachers use material aimed at older students in order to maintain the rapid pace of work and to satisfy the students' appetites for learning. It is not unusual to see students in Years 10 to 11 tackling material that is more the norm for sixth form students, and see the latter working at university level. Expertise from within and outside the school is used very well to enrich the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are very well attended. Excellent opportunities for sporting and musical activities outside lessons are much appreciated by students. Encouraged by a supportive and caring attitude from senior managers, staff show an outstanding commitment to providing additional after-school or lunchtime activities and subject support. Overall, the strong subject expertise of teachers and the numbers available match the needs of the curriculum very well. Accommodation and resources are good and contribute well to the standards achieved. The match of support staff to curricular needs is also good. Curricular provision promotes students' personal development well through a range of opportunities within the curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
21. The school has managed, and monitors effectively, the recent national guidelines on teaching in Years 7 to 9 by drawing on elements that are relevant and pertinent for its students. For example, teachers are encouraged to adopt the use of challenging starters to lessons.
22. The range of courses offered across the school is very good. For example, students can study single sciences as from Year 8 and prepare a range of science GCSE courses. Students can study two modern foreign languages, though relatively few do so to GCSE. They can also study Latin and both classical and modern Greek, the last two currently subsidised by the Greek government. Studying classical languages helps boys' understanding of grammar and word derivation. The requirement for all students in Years 10 and 11 to cover and be assessed on the national ICT programme is not met for those who do not opt for an ICT examination course. The school does not yet coordinate their learning across other subjects to ensure that all have their entitlement. Though students have a regular assembly, this does not occur daily and the requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met. In every other respect, the planned curriculum effectively covers all requirements.
23. Older students make free choices about which subjects they would like to take to GCSE or A level. Their choices are then used to construct options so that nearly all can take their first choices. The courses offered take very good account of students' aspirations. The vast majority wish to continue to higher education, and the curricular provision in Years 10 to 13 serves this aim very well. There is, however, scope for the school to develop relevant strands of the work-related curriculum. Work experience is offered to all students in Year 10 and a real effort is made to organise work shadowing for sixth formers in a field they wish to pursue. Most subjects provide limited learning experiences of the world of work.
24. Students with special educational needs are very well catered for. Teachers know them well and take account of their needs and targets in their individual educational plans. The few with greater needs have excellent weekly individual tutorials. The school recruits into Year 12 a small number of students who have English as a second language. It is unsatisfactory that it offers no provision in school time for them to improve their English in their early weeks in England, although good paid provision is organised.

Care, guidance and support

The school cares for its students very well and ensures their health and safety. It provides very high levels of support, advice and guidance, which are firmly based on the monitoring of progress. The school consults students and acts on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Proper child protection measures are in place in the school and in the boarding houses.
- The school is exceptionally clean and good health and safety procedures are in place.
- Staff provide very strong support, advice and guidance.
- The school is inclusive; it supports well students from many diverse backgrounds.
- Students willingly accept the many opportunities offered to take on extra responsibility.
- The school consults students and acts on their suggestions.

Commentary

25. Child protection practices are up-to-date. New staff are trained soon after arrival and there is a child protection governor. The school has close and effective relations with outside agencies. Students and staff work in a very clean, litter-free environment, which is healthy and safe. Good systems are in place for maintaining and reviewing health and safety practices, though reports of points that need addressing are not filed. All risks have been properly assessed and the governing body is actively involved. Medical arrangements are appropriate. All equipment is regularly tested and fire drills are carried out each term. Access to the *Internet* is strictly controlled. The school is currently taking action on one or two minor health and safety deficiencies.
26. Students are highly valued, whatever their background. Students and parents are highly satisfied with the induction arrangements. There are many ways in which the school promotes students' personal development, and students know they have excellent access to support and guidance, based on close monitoring of their progress. This results in well-informed, confident and happy students. They consider that teachers treat them fairly and help under-performers and those who have difficulty in conforming. For students having difficulties or wishing to improve, many departments provide 'clinics' which teachers generously staff at lunchtimes or after school, or give advice and guidance on subject websites. Parents and students praised this support.
27. Staff, including boarding management, know their charges well and in the main school there is always at least one member, often several, with whom students feel they can develop a thoroughly trusting relationship. This also applies generally in the sixth form, though a minority lacks this perception. The school actively promotes healthy eating and provides high quality restaurant facilities for all and comfortable accommodation for boarders.
28. Pastoral care for boarders is very good. Supervision is very good; it is appropriate to the age and maturity of the boarders. Boarding provides very well for students' personal and academic development, and prepares them well for adult life. Relationships between students, and between students and staff are very good. Boarders have a good programme of trips and visits at weekends and a very good social space in the games hut.
29. A huge range of opportunities is available for students to take responsibility. They willingly do so and it is noticeable how seriously all, but particularly the prefects, attend to their duties. The school has consulted students for several years through the year councils and acted on their advice. All concerned see this consultation as worthwhile. Just before the inspection the school prepared and analysed the response to a questionnaire issued to all students.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are very good. Those with the local community are excellent and with other schools strong.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very well informed about their children's progress and about the school's activities.
- Most parents responded very positively to the questionnaire.
- The contribution of parents to promote students' learning is very good.
- Links with the local community are extensive, varied and very valuable to students.
- Links with other schools are effective.

Commentary

30. The school's literature (such as the prospectus and the governors' annual report) is well produced, informative and expresses clearly the information it needs to give. There is a good termly newsletter, supported by other correspondence with parents as necessary. The school's *Internet* website is attractive and well thought-out.
31. The annual reports on students are, in general, of high quality, setting out what students know, can do and understand. Some teachers' comments on students' performance are rather thin for a whole year's work, however. A strong feature of reporting is the additional interim report on new students and on any causing concern. Staff are regularly available for consultation.
32. The school may consult some parents on specific matters, such as revisions to the code of conduct, though it does not yet seek the views of all parents as a body. Parents are content that the school deals effectively with concerns and complaints.
33. Parents contribute well to their children's learning and many keep a close eye on progress through the homework diary. A thriving friends' and parents' association runs multiple social and fund-raising events, which provide substantial sums for students' benefit. Parents support the school's own activities in many ways, particularly in the areas of careers, sports and attending its social events.
34. Links with the community are very strong. The school works closely with professionals in the local education authority and uses it and other local organisations effectively as critical friends.
35. Students gain substantially from the school's huge range of cultural, artistic and sporting connections. These include a high-quality engineering link with a major national manufacturer for a few students, but more students would benefit if there were further commercial links. Close contacts with the press ensure the school receives extensive favourable coverage both nationally and locally. Students' sense of service to others is greatly enhanced by sponsoring charities and by giving of their own time to support the local community, for example by working in a hospice.
36. Transfer arrangements for students entering the school from over 60 primary schools are as effective as can be expected, but inevitably it is difficult to maintain close links with such a large number. However, some excellent contacts have been developed, for example the sixth formers teach Latin in some primaries and help with cricket coaching. The school works closely with one neighbouring secondary school, and is in regular touch with most of the others. Sixth form staff maintain close links with universities and ensure that students receive very good support with their university applications.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headmaster's excellent leadership is well supported by an effective senior management team.
- Governors provide good leadership; they give generously of their time and expertise.
- The special ethos ensures that all are valued and promotes excellent relationships.
- Pastoral management is very good.
- Governors manage finances very well.
- The quality of subject management is uneven, but in many cases is very good or excellent.
- The school does not fully comply with legal requirements in three areas.

Commentary

37. The headmaster has a clear vision of raising standards in all aspects of students' achievements. He has the confidence of governors, staff, parents and students. He leads a united and stable staff, committed to providing a high quality rounded education. Governors with a valuable range of expertise share this vision. They are prepared to take up difficult issues with senior management, and guide the school very well. Their very good knowledge of the school helps them make good decisions. However, the manifest strength of the governing body and most of what it does is undermined because not all legal requirements are met, so that governance is satisfactory.
38. Management is good overall. The headmaster is very well organised. He, the governors and senior team have created a school where achievement is very high and they have brought good improvement since the last inspection. Senior staff fulfil their line-manager roles effectively and, alongside governors, use data effectively to monitor students and departments. Whole-school planning is good, though not fully documented. The management of recent national guidance on improving teaching in Years 7 to 9 has been very good: most teachers follow the guidance. The introduction of departmental self-evaluation is effective in several departments. Departmental leadership and management are variable. Whilst in many cases they are good and even excellent, monitoring, long-term planning and assessment are weaker aspects of a few departments. Pastoral and academic guidance are strong features of sixth form leadership. Administrative staff ensure the efficient day-to-day running of the school.
39. Leadership and management of boarding are very good. The headmaster and the governors have developed a successful model for managing it; it is well run day-to-day. The school has a clear picture of which students will benefit from the boarding experience and recruits them effectively. Nearly all issues raised in the National Care Standards Commission report have been addressed.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,777,296	Balance from previous year	233,074
Total expenditure	2,772,095	Balance carried forward to the next	238,275
Expenditure per student	3,746		

40. Prudent financial management enables the school to fund what it needs and to maintain sufficient high-calibre teachers and support staff. Many governors have good financial expertise. The chairman of the finance committee visits the bursar regularly to check the financial situation. The bursar keeps a close eye on spending, systematically seeks best value and provides regular financial up-dates. The school makes savings where it can, for example by taking responsibility for catering and some letting of facilities. The school is anxious to

maintain funds to ensure stability of staffing. The overall cost per student is above the upper quartile nationally, and in the sixth form is high, but the school lives within its budget. Given the very high achievement, the school gives good value for money.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE and National Curriculum level results are well above national expectations.
- Standards in reading and writing are very high and outstanding in speaking and listening.
- Highly skilled teaching challenges students to achieve as well as they can.
- Students' fluent use of language and well-developed literacy skills are reflected in their high achievements across all subjects.
- Management does not ensure the structured provision of English across all year groups.
- Assessment programmes are not effectively monitoring students' rate of progress from one stage of learning to the next.
- ICT facilities are not used sufficiently to allow students to extend their skills.

Commentary

41. Very high attainment reached by students in the National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations is matched by the high quality of work observed in lessons. Students' outstanding speaking skills enable them to express their ideas concisely and coherently. Standards on entry are well above average. As a result of structured teaching, which follows recent national guidelines, students make good progress. They achieve very well and most reach the highest level in the Year 9 national tests. Year 7 students' enjoyable weekly drama lesson supports their introduction to Shakespeare's plays.
42. Teaching is very good overall. Teachers' skilful questioning encourages students to think for themselves and search out the meanings from stories, plays, poems and non-fiction material. Students acquire knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and meet the challenge of increasingly demanding tasks. Students are prepared well for GCSE. They have many opportunities to answer sample essay questions, which are marked meticulously indicating ways to improve. This is the major reason that students are achieving high results, a significant improvement since the last inspection.
43. The subject leader is a charismatic teacher who shares his extensive subject knowledge enthusiastically with his students. He enriches students' learning by arranging extra-curricular visits to a range of plays and musicals which broaden students' experience of drama and theatre. However, overall management of the English department is unsatisfactory. Teaching methods in place at present are serving students well because attainment is high. Nonetheless, there is no planned strategy to build on the excellent schemes of work devised for Years 7 to 9 to provide continuity of learning through Years 10 and 11. Assessment schemes are insufficiently structured to track students' rate of progress through each stage of learning to ensure that all achieve at an appropriate level for their capabilities. ICT facilities are not used effectively to explore new teaching approaches that will give breadth and balance to the curriculum and offer a wider range of learning opportunities for all students. To improve further the department needs a framework for planning, structured assessment schemes and more imaginative use of ICT.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

44. Students' fluent use of language and well-developed literacy skills are reflected in all subjects across the curriculum. Older students speak eloquently on a range of topics. They explain their ideas coherently and explore different viewpoints with skill and courtesy. In most subjects students listen carefully to each other and present their arguments logically. These skills fuel their writing because they use a range of language confidently, selecting vocabulary specific to the subject they are studying. Students refine their reading skills by skimming and scanning a variety of texts to select relevant information, which they record carefully. These very good oral and written skills contribute significantly to students' high achievements in many subjects. As one parent commented 'students develop confidence without arrogance'.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in French and German is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding teaching in both French and German leads to very high achievement.
- Students reach excellent standards in French and German. GCSE results are exceptional.
- Management and leadership of the subjects are very strong.
- Students' commitment to learning is exemplary.
- The departments should continue to develop their application of ICT.

Commentary

45. Standards in modern foreign languages are exceptionally high. By the end of Year 9 students' results are well above average and often outstanding. In Years 7 to 9 written work and students' speaking and comprehension skills are excellent and their grasp of grammar is exceptional. An unusually high percentage of students attain grades A*/A at GCSE. These exceptionally high standards are reflected in students' work in Years 10 and 11; students speak with great confidence, write with accuracy and have extremely high levels of comprehension of written and spoken language.
46. The achievement of students across the school is very good indeed, and in many cases is quite exceptional. The progress that they make over time in French and German in both knowledge and skills is often remarkable; it is particularly so in German in view of the limited time that students have in Years 8 and 9. The levels of speaking and listening skills attained by students in Years 7 to 9, combined with a wide and confident knowledge and application of grammar, are often exceptional. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is equally very good in both languages where written work is particularly accurate and extensive and comprehension skills are excellent.
47. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. The very high levels of achievement reflect students' very positive attitudes to their studies and the consistently excellent quality of teaching observed. Teachers have the highest expectations of their students and consistently plan opportunities, using a wide range of resources, which encourage students to show what they can do and reflect on how they might improve. The notable features of all lessons are the challenging tasks set within a very structured programme. Pace is always brisk and time extremely well used. Excellent relationships and the consistent use of the foreign language in all lessons encourage students, not only to work to their full capacity, but also to take the initiative to expand their own learning.
48. The leadership and management of modern foreign languages by the joint heads of department are very strong indeed. A clear, shared vision to maintain the high profile of modern languages is confirmed in a realistic and costed development plan. Detailed procedures for monitoring

students' progress through close analysis of data, homework, work and assessments ensure that the department is clear about its effectiveness. It sets itself very high standards. Comprehensive schemes of work and guidance help ensure consistently high expectations across teachers. Heads of department are excellent role models for colleagues.

49. Improvement is very good since the last inspection. The very high standards and quality of teaching have been surpassed.

Example of outstanding practice

Able Year 9 students in their second year of German learning about transport, using the perfect tense.

All use German consistently. Vocabulary is introduced with flashcards and progressively more difficult questions requiring practice of prepositions + dative/accusative. The perfect tense is reinforced using 'triggers' stuck to the whiteboard, eg, *gestern, letzte Woche*. In pairs students compete to produce outlandish phrases, *Gestern sind wir mit der Strassenbahn nach Berlin geflogen*. Students assess each other for accuracy and interest, 'Das war toll! Das war aber langweilig!' Teacher introduces more complex time, manner and place phrases using *PowerPoint*, then gradually removes key words. Students are challenged to recreate their complex imaginative sentences using link words, initially orally around the class, followed by rewriting a range of extended sentences with minimal prompts, eg *Vorgestern bin ich mit dem Luftkissenboot nach Frankreich gefahren, aber heute fahre ich mit dem Zug durch den Kanaltunnel nach Hause*.

Students then quiz each other orally in pairs, given only the prompt question words, 'Wie?/Wohin?/Wann?' to create past tense questions and elicit correct answers. A first-class plenary consolidates the new material with *Power Point* and a brainstorming of the new transport vocabulary and time/place expressions. The outcome is excellent mastery of new vocabulary and structures in fluent and imaginative sentences.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work seen are well above average, and very high in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is good, and students have a very positive attitude to learning.
- Results in Year 9 national tests are very high compared with all schools nationally and students achieve very well.
- Insufficient monitoring of the work of the department leads to inconsistencies in practice, for example in teaching, the use of ICT and the development of literacy.

Commentary

50. Students' standards are well above average when they enter the school. They are very high in national tests in Year 9. An increasing proportion of students reach exceptional performance. Results compare more favourably with national standards than those in English and science. This represents very good achievement during Years 7 to 9. In GCSE examinations, although results in 2002 were well above the national average, students performed less well than in most of their other subjects. Results improved in 2003, particularly in the number of students gaining A* and A grades. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good.
51. Current standards are well above average throughout the school. In most classes in Years 7 to 9, students enjoy the challenge of regular practice of number skills at the start of lessons and their ability to manipulate numbers improves. This practice is less well established in Years 10 and 11; as a result, older students are more reliant on calculators. Students are articulate and explain their reasoning very well when given the opportunity to contribute to lessons. The use of investigative exercises is increasing; students' coursework marks are therefore improving. Most students take pride in their written work, and show how they obtain their answers. A minority take insufficient care. Students with special educational needs are well integrated, given help when required and achieve well.

52. Teaching and learning are good overall, and very good in Years 7 to 9. In one lesson teaching was unsatisfactory. Committed teachers have a very good command of their subject. Planning of work is thorough, but the emphasis is often on lesson content, rather than on devising learning strategies for students. Lesson objectives are normally clear. In the best lessons, learning is effectively consolidated in the last ten minutes. Teachers ensure sufficient challenge for higher attaining students. Some teaching lacks flair and explanations are unclear to some in a few classes, as reported by a number of parents and students. Students' very good attitudes and behaviour and their real desire to learn make most confident enough to ask for additional explanation. Homework is set and marked regularly. There are few references to national levels and grades to help students to review their progress. In many, but not all, lessons, strategies for improving students' literacy skills are used well. The use of ICT also is inconsistent, partly because of access difficulties.
53. Leadership and management of the department is satisfactory overall. Although detailed plans guide teachers' work, the scheme of work for Years 10 and 11 needs revision. The brief development plan lacks vision, and the handbook is out-of-date. Insufficient time is allocated to monitoring teaching and marking. Very good relationships exist within the team, however, and there is good delegation of responsibility to the deputy head of department who has established a very good system for tracking the performance of individual students. Not all teachers use this system effectively for the early identification of students who are under-achieving. Progress is satisfactory since the last inspection. Standards have remained very high, particularly in Years 7 to 9, but insufficient priority has been given to improving the quality of teaching by replicating best practice.

Mathematics across the curriculum

54. The standard of numeracy is well above average, especially in Years 7 to 9. The priority given to developing students' confidence with number is supporting their learning across the curriculum. There has been a cross-curricular audit and some training, but there is no whole school policy for numeracy, and no monitoring of practice in order to eradicate the possibility of inconsistencies.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**. Physics, chemistry and biology were inspected.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and students obtain excellent results in national tests at age 14 and at GCSE.
- High expectations and very good use of questioning enable all students to achieve very well throughout the school.
- Students show excellent attitudes to their work.
- The best of students' investigative work is of a particularly high quality.
- Assessment is used very well to monitor students' progress.
- Marking does not always show students how to improve their work.

Commentary

55. Students' excellent results reflect very good achievement through the school, as a result both of the very good teaching they receive and of their commitment to their work. Searching questioning by teachers, and stimulating discussion in many lessons, develop students' ability to relate their extensive factual knowledge to an in-depth understanding of underlying principles. Students manipulate abstract ideas capably and relate learning in science to their own experience. Ideas are explained clearly and in detail, but some teaching follows examination requirements too closely.
56. The level of students' work, by the time they take GCSE, is well in advance of the norm for their age, covering several topics at a level more usual in sixth form work. Literacy and numeracy skills are good, and the use of ICT has improved since the last inspection. All students are included fully, and achieve equally well.
57. Teaching and learning are very good. Students participate with enthusiasm and interest. They work quickly and with a sense of purpose, and persevere when a new technique, such as data logging, is introduced. They respond well to the brisk pace at which lessons take place, rapidly grasping new ideas, and achieving much in almost all lessons. Only occasionally are they confused when too many ideas are introduced at once.
58. Students are encouraged to research widely. They enjoy broadening their work beyond the immediate demands of examination syllabuses, though such opportunities are limited at present to outside the lessons.
59. Students' investigative work is at best at a very high standard, showing their ability to draw inferences from their results and evaluate what they have achieved. Such skills are developed most effectively when teachers devote time to discussing the outcomes of experiments and encouraging students to improve their techniques.
60. Schemes of work are sometimes insufficiently detailed and provide too little guidance on how to approach a topic or how to provide for students of differing ability. Increased use of assessment to identify students whose work may become a concern has enabled the school to provide effective support; the use of assessment has improved considerably since the last inspection.
61. Leadership and management are good. Many staff actively seek ways of improving their teaching. Although heads of department monitor teaching, they have not yet ensured that marking always shows students how to improve their work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **unsatisfactory** because not all students in Years 10 and 11 receive their ICT entitlement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 is very good.
- Teachers' knowledge, expectations and help given to students are excellent.
- Students' attitudes and application are excellent.
- The curriculum and assessment of students in Years 10 and 11 not following an examination course are unsatisfactory.
- The accommodation and learning resources are heavily used so access is not always easy.

Commentary

62. Standards on entry to the school are variable and broadly in line with the national average. By the end of Year 9 standards have risen to well above the national average. Achievement is very good. One in eight students opt to take the GCSE in ICT in Years 10 and 11. This new course has not yet been examined. Standards of work in the lesson seen were very good. In Years 10 and 11, students have opportunities to use ICT in most other subjects, but their achievement is not monitored. Good opportunities are provided in design and technology, science and the humanities. ICT is little used in English and physical education. Overall standards are variable and not assessed as required. Opportunities to improve computing skills depend on students' choice of subjects and the interest of individual staff. The national curriculum entitlement is not delivered to all students.
63. The quality of teaching and learning within the department is very good overall. Students learn a good range of skills in Years 7 to 9 and some advanced methods to manipulate data in their work on spreadsheets. Teachers introduce topics and give individual students very good help in practical activities. They use questions effectively to involve students in lessons. Overhead computerised projectors are well used. Some teachers review the work done in previous lessons well. Pace is very good. As a result, students make very good progress and are eager to learn. Students' work is assessed and monitored very well.
64. In the GCSE course, students learn more advanced skills and information about the computer systems needed to carry out a range of tasks and they achieve very well.
65. Leadership and management within the department are good. The head of department has done much to improve standards, revise schemes of work and improve computer facilities since his appointment two years ago. He has more recently been appointed ICT co-ordinator and has reviewed the work done in other subjects, but has not yet planned how each subject should contribute to give a balanced coverage of skills. The improved computer facilities are heavily used. The application of ICT in other subjects is restricted by lack of access to the main computer rooms and a lack of a planned programme to cover a good range of applications in other subjects. Accommodation is adequate. Changes since the last inspection are satisfactory but the need to meet the statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11 remain.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. As from Year 10, students who are not taking a GCSE in computing learn their ICT skills through their work for other subjects. Many subjects have a very good range of learning materials and revision exercises on the school's network, which are accessed both during lessons and from students' homes. The *Internet* is much used to research topics. Several teachers do not integrate the use of ICT sufficiently into students' subject learning, especially in English, geography, mathematics and modern languages. Students have good access to the school's computers outside normal school hours. Students' ICT skills are not separately assessed in subjects other than ICT, as required.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is excellent and focuses clearly on development.
- Teachers' encouragement and excellent guidance lead to very good learning.
- Very good teaching and students' positive response result in very high standards and very good achievement.

- Teachers do not use ICT sufficiently as an everyday tool to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary

67. Students reach well above average standards at GCSE with a significant number attaining at A* and A grades. Nearly all students by the end of Year 9 reach the highest national curriculum levels.
68. Achievement is very good and standards are high. By Year 9 students' written work shows a breadth of knowledge and a depth of understanding, particularly of the links between physical factors and human activities. Students' assessments show good use of numeracy, geographical vocabulary and ICT skills. Older students build effectively on prior learning; their oral and written answers reflect broader thinking about geographical questions and they search for answers through fieldwork and from a variety of sources including ICT. Students in Year 11 produce excellent coursework, indicative of their own considerable contribution to their high achievement.
69. Teaching and learning are very good. Students' confidence increases as a result of the encouragement and excellent guidance given to them by their teachers. Students willingly meet their teachers' high expectations. Well-planned lessons and a range of activities consolidate and extend learning. Students are challenged at a high level by skilled and probing questioning as befits their capabilities and the level of work. The pace in lessons is very good and productivity is high. Teachers use resources well to enhance teaching. They use *PowerPoint* presentations effectively to illustrate topics to whole groups. However, this good practice is inconsistently applied across the department. ICT is not used often enough in lessons, despite teachers' expertise. In Years 7 to 9 starter and plenary activities do not always spark interest or sufficiently test recall. In these years marking is helpful but students do not know the level of their achievement, as national curriculum levels are not shared with them.
70. The subject benefits considerably from experienced leadership that inspires learning and has made the subject a very popular choice at GCSE. Management is very good. The head of department makes very good use of teachers' individual skills and is receptive to new ideas, such as the introduction of the geography web site, the very good citizenship education and using the excellent data provided to track students' progress. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

History

Provision in history is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very high standards are maintained in all year groups and in GCSE examinations.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge very effectively in classrooms.
- Learning is helped by a shared sense of purpose underpinned by excellent relationships.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Students have very positive attitudes and achieve very well in all year groups.
- A commendable programme of visits and a thriving history society extend learning.

Commentary

71. Results in the GCSE examination in recent years have been very high, especially for the A* to A grades. In 2002, for example, four-fifths of the students entered achieved the highest grades. In lessons seen and work analysed, standards are well above national expectations and students exhibit very high levels of achievement throughout the age range. Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 11. From the start of Year 7, students develop historical skills very rapidly and are able to write clearly and effectively using their subject knowledge and understanding to the full. These very high standards are maintained in Years 10 and 11 as students develop an in-depth analysis of historical issues. As a result, they are prepared very well for success in public examinations, as is shown by the results over time.
72. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall and has many excellent features. Specialist teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to stimulate and motivate all students. There is an air of rigour and purpose to lessons. This, in turn, gives students confidence to ask questions, explore issues and become budding historians in their own right. Year 9 students used their historical skills to the full in examining and linking the factors that led to the German defeat in the First World War. Students respond to teachers' very high expectations with enthusiasm and maturity.
73. The department has many strengths, most especially in the excellent leadership and management. The performance of all students is monitored thoroughly and they are given very clear advice on how to improve their work. ICT is used imaginatively in the department.
74. The department has improved the proportion of high grades since the last report. The very high uptake of the subject after Year 9 and the consistently creditable GCSE results are testament to the dedication and hard work of the very effective teaching team.

Religious education

Provision in religious studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Discussion and assessments make a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Encouragement and guidance by teachers are very good and build confidence.
- Insufficient time limits in-depth study in the short course in Years 10 and 11.
- The work in students' books in Year 7-9 is an insufficient record of their learning.
- The head of department's diverse responsibilities constrain subject development.

Commentary

75. Standards are above average. On GCSE courses a significant number of students reach the highest grades. Standards reached by Year 9 are above average.
76. By Year 9 students' knowledge of world faiths is very good. They speak articulately and thoughtfully about the spirituality and abstract concepts underlying Christianity and Buddhism, showing a mature respect for differences in belief and faith leaders. The high standard in lessons is not reflected in the quality and quantity of written work. Higher standards are evident in well-written assessments, which show good research using texts, including the Bible and ICT. Students achieve well overall.
77. Year 11 students following both the GCSE long and the non-examined short course have a good breadth of knowledge. Meaningful discussion is frustrated in the short course by thirty-

minute lessons. GCSE students use ICT and cross-curricular learning to explore the expression of religion through art, music and literature. They produce thoughtful, very spiritual, creative and well-written work, deserving of the high grades attained.

78. Teaching and learning are good. Non-specialist teachers make a valuable contribution, particularly in the short course in Years 10 and 11. All teachers have good subject knowledge and that of the subject leader is very good. This builds the confidence of students, as do the very good encouragement and relationships within lessons. Students have good opportunities for independent research. The awareness raised of spiritual concepts and the strong emphasis on moral and social issues and their links with religious teaching contribute considerably to students' personal development. Teachers take care to present a balanced view. Planning neglects opportunities for students to record their learning fully, despite time being available in Years 7 to 9. The lack of time in the short course prevents any record being compiled and teachers do not provide summary notes. Remarks on students' work do not indicate to students how they can improve.
79. That leadership and management are good is an indication of dedication and hard work. The head of department manages other curricular areas besides teaching the bulk of religious studies. This results in insufficient time for subject development, particularly the implementation of the newly revised Essex Agreed syllabus and its links with assessments. It also curtails detailed marking of students' work. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good.
- Teachers' knowledge, expectations and help given to students are excellent.
- Students' attitudes, application and acquisition of skills are excellent.
- A safe area needs to be defined around each machine to warn students not to enter when the machine is in use.
- There are no opportunities to learn food or textile technologies.

Commentary

80. Standards on entry to the school are variable. By the time students reach the end of Year 9 standards rise to well above the national average. They work effectively in wood, plastic and metal and learn basic control, electronics, mechanisms and structures well, and are able to make accurate and precision products.
81. Well over half of students opt to take the subject in Years 10 and 11. They learn more advanced skills and undertake a major design and make project. Students produce a variety of electro-mechanical products and board games extremely well, and use computer-aided design and manufacture very effectively. With the help of local companies, students built an electrically driven car for the Ford 'Green Power' competition last year - they came twelfth in the national final. In 2002, GCSE results were very high compared with the national average, nearly all were graded A* to C and about a third obtained A* and A grades. Achievement across the school is very good.
82. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall and sometimes excellent. All teachers are very well qualified, have excellent subject knowledge and very high expectations. There is

excellent emphasis on teaching skills and practical activities. Teachers have very good relationships with students; as a result, students' attitudes are extremely positive and they are eager to learn. Students' work is assessed and monitored very well.

83. More needs to be done to develop students' awareness of the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of their work. There are no opportunities for students to learn food technology or textile technology. The course in resistant materials is being withdrawn.
84. Leadership and management are very good. Teaching schemes are regularly reviewed and up-dated. The department has many good machine tools, two of which are computer controlled. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The high standards and very good achievement have been maintained. The accommodation and learning resources have been improved.

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.
- Achievement is very good.
- The quality of teaching is excellent.
- Very good relationships foster excellent attitudes and very good behaviour.
- Critical studies and the use of sketchbooks are very well developed.
- Visits to local and national galleries enrich students' cultural development.
- The use of ICT is under-developed in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

85. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above national expectations. This is very good achievement since students join Year 7 with a wide disparity of prior experience, many lacking confidence in areas such as printmaking, ceramics and 3-dimensional work. Students effectively use a wide range of media but have few opportunities for ICT in Years 7 to 9. Students use subject vocabulary correctly when evaluating their own work and that of established artists. Most have a very good knowledge of a wide range of artists from different times and cultures. They recognise a variety of art movements such as Cubism, Surrealism and Pop art. Students' attitudes are excellent and, with the exception of lapses by a small group in one Year 9 class, behave extremely well.
86. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average. In 2002, all students entered gained A*-C grades and nearly half gained A*/A grades. Students did less well than in most other subjects, but this represents very good improvement since the last inspection. Numbers have recently doubled. Students make intelligent, creative use of sketchbooks for homework and to make close observational drawings. They critically research the lives and ideas of artists, practise drawing skills, make diagrams and annotate sketches, which they incorporate into larger finished paintings and sculptures. They benefit from residential weekends and visits to local and national galleries. Most use digital photography and computers well, outside lessons, to scan, modify and print their own imagery.

Example of outstanding practice

Students in Year 7 compare concepts of beauty in art and mathematics. Teacher skilfully combines the Fibonacci sequence of numbers 0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21 (keep adding the last two number) and how they appear in various 'family trees' and patterns of spirals in nature such as leaves and shells. Students accurately measure and draw a succession of squares and rectangles using the Fibonacci sequence to replicate a diagram of a sliced nautilus shell. They know that this 'magical' sequence is known as the Golden Mean. Teacher builds upon students' knowledge by adding colour theory to challenge thinking. Students colour their diagrams using complementary colours (opposites in the theoretical colour wheel). They also replicate Matisse's cut-paper depiction of 'The Snail' using their own spiral patterns of complementary colours. They enjoy tonal theory, (colours which appear to recede or come forward) because teacher applies elements of fun when challenging perceptions. Students exclaim in excitement as they recognise optical effects of colour changes when cones in optic nerves relax colour memory and 'see' complementaries. Students make excellent progress because of well-planned intellectual games. (Leonardo Fibonacci. Italy 1170-1240 AD)

87. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Teachers are excellent role models and demonstrate skills well. They closely monitor students' progress and give very good individual verbal feedback, so that students know what they need to do to improve.
88. Leadership is excellent and management very good. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Sculptural work of a very high standard is now well established. This is directly attributed to the excellent teaching and the new, spacious accommodation. Lack of technical support results in teachers spending much time, outside lessons, preparing materials. Display is not used enough to show the outstanding work of the department.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- Students achieve consistently very high standards in all years because they have high-level music skills and are very well motivated.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Challenging teaching and thorough assessment support very good achievement.

Commentary

89. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 in the last two years shows all students at or above the expected level. Three-quarters reach a higher level. GCSE results are well above the national average. In 2002 all gained A* to C grades with over two-thirds gaining A* or A grades. In 2003 all students gained grades A* to C and over half were awarded A* or A. A large proportion of students learn to play instruments, in or out of school. Many reach high standards for their age on more than one instrument. This gives a sure foundation for performance, composition and listening and appraisal, though the last is recognised as less strong for most GCSE students as yet.
90. Achievement is very good in every year because all students are diligent and respond very well in lessons. They use their instruments regularly in lessons, and all enjoy very rich learning experiences. Many extend learning voluntarily through music activity beyond lessons, both in formal groups and when self-motivated. The level of mutual support evident in collaborative work is exemplary. Students react very well to the challenges and targets negotiated with teachers. With so many able musicians it is notable that modesty and admiration prevail rather than envy and excessive competition.

91. Teaching and learning are very good with features of excellence. Engagement of students, seen in most lessons, conveys the magic of music. Listening encourages personal responses – spoken, written and felt. Previous learning is applied very well to new situations. Storage of students' written and recorded work, and the teachers' feedback, provide a very good record of learning so that progress can be monitored. Students in Years 7 to 9 know how to improve their work, but would benefit from a clearer understanding of national curriculum criteria to understand how well they are doing. Development of computer-aided work in the lower years is needed and is planned.
92. Leadership is excellent. There is a clear vision of the potential for music here. Focus on priorities produces improvement in standards and provision. Links with outside agencies are strong. Management is also excellent. The work of the 15 instrumental teachers is managed very well. The refurbished and extended accommodation, with excellent display, provides a first-class learning environment and is used very well indeed throughout the school day. Innovative use of curriculum time and staff benefits learning.
93. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have risen and GCSE numbers increased. Most weaknesses noted then have been overcome.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and the response of students is excellent.
- The range of sporting fixtures and opportunities is excellent.
- No system is in place for tracking and monitoring students' long-term progress.

Commentary

94. On the basis of teacher assessments standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average. In the present Year 9 and Year 11 standards are also well above average, with particular strengths in rugby and cricket. A significant number of individual students also attain high standards in football, hockey, tennis, athletics and swimming.
95. Given the wide variety of their prior experience, students in Years 7 to 9 achieve very well. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 where students have opportunities to experience additional sports such as badminton and squash at the local leisure centre.
96. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Lessons are challenging and well organised. The response of students to the teaching they receive is exemplary. All become fully engrossed in their work. They listen attentively and make every effort to apply what they have heard to the very best of their ability. Relationships are relaxed and good-humoured and give all students the confidence to make progress.
97. Good improvement since the last inspection includes assessment which takes account of National Curriculum levels, extended opportunities for older students and some specialist coaches to support the work of the departmental staff. Standards have improved among middle and lower attaining students. Better links with local sports clubs provide additional opportunities for higher attaining students to extend their level of skill.
98. Leadership and management are good. Teachers from outside the department help with games and run school teams. Organisation is efficient and harmonious. No system is in place to track and monitor students' long-term progress. There are plans to rectify this and to provide

opportunities for students to gain external accreditation through the different sporting bodies where appropriate. A group of Year 10 students has just begun studying for the GCSE examination outside normal lessons, as GCSE is not available within the option choices

99. Students enjoy an extensive range of competitive fixtures in a wide variety of sports throughout the year. An excellent feature is that the department frequently runs more than one team within each age group, thereby allowing more students to represent the school. The school is a centre of excellence for table tennis, achieving considerable success in local leagues. Many boarders enjoy the table tennis facilities. Other teams succeed well in athletics, basketball, cricket and football. The many opportunities provided for students outside lessons make an important contribution to the standards achieved and to the students' social and moral development.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal and social education and personal development

Personal and social education is covered through a weekly 30-minute tutorial, registration periods, and a personal development lesson in Years 10 and 11. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a supervised private study period. All were sampled. The evidence is not solid enough to give an overall judgement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Health, sex and drugs education are well covered by specially trained staff.
- Careers education appears at least satisfactory.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 use private study periods extremely sensibly and well. They develop a range of independent study skills.
- Time is not always used profitably in registration/tutorial periods. Some are very well used, for example students give talks which help develop speaking and listening skills and give confidence in addressing an audience. Others are mainly social sessions.

Citizenship

Provision for citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The ethos and aims of the school and opportunities provided strongly support many aspects of this new subject.
- Aspects of citizenship are reported to parents.
- Identifying where teaching and learning of citizenship will take place and be assessed is, as yet, incomplete.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning of the standards students achieve are not yet in place.

Commentary

100. It is not possible to make an overall judgement on provision. There is insufficient evidence to make a judgement on standards based on course work. Reports to parents in July 2003 gave the broad strands of this new subject and merged tutors' reports with students' self-assessment on participation and voluntary activity. Students in Years 7 to 9 are not clear about what is considered as citizenship. Tracking students' progress and identifying where work on citizenship will be assessed is at an early stage. Schemes of work in subject departments include references to covering aspects of citizenship.

101. Achievement through participating in the school's own community and beyond, including taking responsibility, is very good. These aspects are generally very strong throughout the school.
102. Too little teaching was seen to make an overall judgement on its quality, but where teaching and learning specific enough to the programmes of study was observed, it was mainly good or very good. Most is found in personal development lessons for Years 10 and 11, and in some tutorials. In Year 8 geography, a module based on the problems of global warming in developing countries included informed discussion and choices amongst the least damaging options, based on United Nations' practice. Critical thinking in Year 10 used political cartoons effectively to strengthen students' understanding of satire and exaggeration.
103. Democratic processes are experienced through year councils, chaired and minuted by students. Feedback to the student electorate needs support from tutors. One student is a member of the 'UK parliament'; a link management wants to develop further. There are very good opportunities for debate beyond lessons and for public speaking. A debate 'This house would abolish the monarchy', whilst poorly attended, developed very well the critical thinking of speakers. There is no formal structure for whole school issues to be discussed by all years, such as a school council, but the school solicited all students' views on a range of aspects before the inspection. Students do have contact with governors' business.
104. Leadership is satisfactory. Senior managers are very supportive of the underlying principles. Management is unsatisfactory. The appointed teacher, with an assistant head, received training and has conducted the necessary audit of content in subjects and talked to staff. The teacher has multiple responsibilities, however, and too little time to establish the subject in the minds and practice of all teachers and to monitor the quality of provision and achievement from Years 7 to 11. Managers are aware of the further developments needed to make good the weaker areas. They are using sources outside the school, including emerging national advice and a local example of good practice.

SUBJECTS IN THE SIXTH FORM

Eleven subjects were inspected and reported on in detail. In these subjects, the inspector scrutinised samples of work and spoke with a group of students. 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
English	31	100	99	94	44	111	84
French	21	100	96	67	46	99	83
Mathematics	30	73	74	50	34	46	31
Chemistry	14	100	85	88	37	54	35
Physics	12	100	82	75	36	54	34
Biology	6	100	82	100	33	58	33
ICT	12	100	78	83	21	48	29
Geography	5	100	88	60	36	52	36
Art	5	100	90	80	39	54	39

Economics	8	100	86	88	42	53	37
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Level 3 GCE A level

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	31	100	99	94	44	111	84
French	21	100	96	67	46	99	83
German	7	100	96	100	44	120	82
Latin	11	100	99*	82	52*	109	88*
Classical civilisation	16	100	99*	94	52*	110	88*
Mathematics	47	100	93	85	52	108	85
Further mathematics	9	100	N/a	82	N/a	109	N/a
Chemistry	38	100	94	87	46	110	81
Physics	35	100	93	94	43	113	79
Computing	28	96	89	68	22	94	70
Geography	37	100	97	70	41	100	81
History	41	100	97	98	41	115	81
Art	14	100	96	85	49	111	85
Music	6	100	98	100	42	107	82
Economics	52	100	96	79	46	104	83
General Studies	113	100	90	84	21	107	69

*Numbers for classical subjects are small nationally, so that Latin, Greek and Classical civilisation are grouped together for national comparators.

**The school entries for design and technology and Greek are under 5 candidates and too small to provide valid national comparisons.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

There are 38 students in Year 12 and 35 in Year 13. 5 lessons were observed.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A level are consistently well above national averages.
- Students' very good achievement is reflected in the high standards of work observed.
- Students learn very well and achieve high results because the teaching is very good.
- Teachers share their good knowledge, encouraging students to write well.
- Students flourish in the warm relationships established and try to live up to their teachers' high expectation.
- Management is not strong enough. Assessment and learning are not structured to meet the needs of all students.

- ICT facilities are not exploited sufficiently for alternative forms of presentation.

Commentary

105. Standards are very high in national terms and achievement is very good. Results in AS examinations encourage virtually all students to continue on the A-level course. Teachers' high expectations for their students engage them in ongoing analysis focused on the deeper understanding of literary texts. A-level students speak eloquently on a range of topics. 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. Students support their arguments with relevant quotations from the texts studied. Advanced level students apply this learning to their personal writing which empowers them with sophisticated strategies for constructing effective essays.
106. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers share their considerable subject knowledge through skilful questioning techniques which encourage students to reflect on the texts they are studying. Consequently, students' writing is of the highest quality and shows consistent improvement since the last inspection. Students spoke appreciatively of the support and guidance they receive; however, they find some lessons dull and too teacher dominated.
107. Overall management of sixth form courses lacks the innovative direction needed to introduce new learning programmes. Students have insufficient opportunities to experiment with alternative methods of presenting their work, such as ICT, to broaden their experience and equip them with skills for their future development.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

108. Students speak eloquently and develop an outstanding command of language. They sustain complex arguments on a range of topics with confidence and style. They express their own and alternative points of view succinctly, debate very well and are confident when they speak to audiences within school and in the community. Their language skills support them very well in all their subjects.

French

In French, there are 32 students in Year 12 and 26 in Year 13. In German, there are 5 in Year 12 and 9 in Year 13. The focus was on French. Two lessons of French and two of German were observed.

Provision in French is **excellent**. It is equally **excellent** in German.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in public examinations are outstanding.
- The quality of teaching is excellent.
- Leadership and management of the subjects are very good indeed.
- Students speak and write with flair and fluency and have excellent comprehension.
- Students' commitment to learning is excellent.

Commentary

109. Results in AS/A-level French are exceptional. Results are equally outstanding in German. This maintains a trend which is consistently and significantly above average. Students reach exceptionally high standards and achieve excellence in both languages. Written work is of the highest quality; students write with sustained accuracy and idiom. They use complex language

with fluency and have no difficulty in understanding an astonishing breadth of written and spoken language. They discuss and debate in the foreign language with flair and maturity. The very high levels of achievement are the result of students' very high commitment to learning and the excellent quality of teaching.

110. Teachers are excellent linguists, fully aware of examination requirements, and they set very high goals for their students. Pace is rapid. Teachers' high expectations and students' desire to excel are the main reasons for success.
111. Management and leadership are very good indeed. The rigorous analysis of students' progress and results contributes to the sustained successes in public examinations. Languages have improved further from the very good provision in the last inspection.

Latin

Classical subjects are popular. Nine students in Year 12 and 10 in Year 13 study Latin. Classical civilisation has 30 in Year 12 and 10 in Year 13. Classical Greek has 3 in Year 12 and 6 in Year 13. Three Latin lessons, 3 of classical civilisation and one extra-curricular Greek lesson were observed.

Provision in Latin is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the most recent examination all students achieved A or B grades.
- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good; teachers enthuse and challenge students with their very good subject knowledge.
- Students are successful independent learners.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Some students do not take a sufficiently active part in lessons.
- Greater use could be made to display more of the high quality work.

Commentary

112. In Year 13 current standards are well above average and the students' achievement is very good. In four out of the last five years all students have achieved A or B grades.
113. Most students achieve good grades at GCSE. They build on their very good knowledge of Latin grammar and increase their linguistic competence in Year 12, for example, by starting work on prose composition. Although this technique is not a feature of the AS examination, it prepares them very well for the Year 13 course. They understand well a good range of advanced constructions and tenses and deal confidently with cases. In unprepared translation and comprehension they meet a very good range of texts. They adopt a variety of approaches to their work. Some prefer the relative security of a literal translation, for example, of an ablative absolute, while others adopt a more modern and natural rendering. Their appreciation of different authors' styles is significant and they support their text work with wider reading in English. Very proficient work at scanning hexameters was seen.
114. Teaching is very good. The three well-qualified teachers are totally confident in their knowledge of Latin and its literature, and transmit their enthusiasm to the students. They prepare lessons very well and ensure appropriate progression in learning. They use open-question techniques to involve the students and reply to students' queries with well thought out and detailed answers. They encourage independent learning and have high expectations of what the students can achieve. The very good relationships between teachers and students lead to productive lessons. Students bring to the lessons a strong work ethos and a keen desire to learn. Regular assessment helps to monitor progress throughout the course.

115. The department is very well led and managed; the teachers work well together. Curriculum planning is effective. The availability of classes in Greek and classical civilisation complements Latin very well. School visits to Italy and Greece add considerable interest to the curriculum. Sixth form students enjoy and derive satisfaction from going into primary schools to teach Latin. The students value the teaching and the teachers' care and interest. Girls who join in Year 12 strongly praise the help and guidance given.

MATHEMATICS

There are 54 students in Year 12 and 51 in Year 13 studying mathematics and 11 in Year 12 and 13 in Year 13 studying further mathematics. Six lessons were observed.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good command of their subject, and the work is challenging.
- Standards are very high; students gain a very high proportion of A and B grades.
- Students present their work clearly and logically.
- The subject is popular, and there is a good take-up.
- There is insufficient use of data to monitor performance against expectations.

Commentary

116. Students taking the AS and A-level courses have all obtained at least grade A in their GCSE examination. Standards at A level are very high compared with national averages in the 2002 examinations. The proportion obtaining grades A or B was very high, and all in mathematics obtained a pass grade. Overall, results in 2003 improved slightly. The overall standard of the small number of girls, whilst high, was a little lower than that of the boys. Students from an ethnic minority background performed better than other groups. There has been an improving trend in the average points score in the last six years. Students mostly obtain the grades predicted by their performance at GCSE. Overall achievement is therefore very good.
117. In further mathematics, standards are very high. In the 2002 examination, all but one candidate obtained a grade A. In 2003, results remained very high. Students' achievement is excellent.
118. In the AS examination, results in 2002 were largely as predicted, and standards were very high. In 2003, however, standards were not as high as expected. A minority of students plan to retake a number of module tests in order to improve overall grades. Achievement at this level is generally good.
119. Current standards are well above average, and reflect the high quality of examination results in recent years. Students respond positively to the challenge of the work, and explain clearly how they arrive at their answers. They help each other by discussing the more difficult concepts. They concentrate well, and readily ask for additional explanation when they are unsure. They appreciate the quality of teaching.
120. There is a very good take-up for mathematics. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. A high proportion of students complete the course. Many in the department teach to A level; students benefit from the different strengths they possess. Most teachers present the work clearly and logically. Thorough planning is helped by good quality handbooks for each topic. In many lessons, teachers involve students in the presentation of solutions to the questions. Students enjoy this interaction with their peers. Challenging homework extends and consolidates learning and is generally marked frequently and accurately, so that students are aware of how well they are progressing.

121. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Increasing use of the school intranet consolidates understanding through a selection of test papers and information for students on each module. Target-setting is becoming more widely used, but there is insufficient monitoring of examination data to measure the performance of the department each year. Overall, improvement in sixth form provision is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

122. Results in GCSE mathematics are very high and several able mathematicians join the school in Year 12, so that students have the skills to support learning in other subjects, as was observed when art students scaled up drawings, and in economics when students easily changed variables in economic models.

SCIENCE

There are 40 students in Year 12 and 38 in Year 13 studying biology, 55 in Year 12 and 58 in Year 13 studying chemistry and 50 in Year 12 and 44 in Year 13 studying physics. Three lessons of both physics and chemistry were observed. One biology lesson was sampled.

Biology examination results are very high. In the lesson seen, teaching and learning were good and students attentive.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and rigorous, promoting positive attitudes to learning.
- Very good teaching leads to students' very good achievement.
- High attaining students are not always well enough challenged in lessons, but good opportunities are provided for them to extend learning outside lessons.

Commentary

123. Examination results were very high in 2002 and were similar in 2003. Two students gained the accolade of being among the top five across the whole country for one examining board.

124. Standards when students enter the sixth form in Year 12 are above average, but some have insecure basic knowledge, particularly in the case of girls. However, they achieve very well and standards are very high by Year 13, matching recent examination results. Almost all respond very well to teachers' probing questions that encourage them to draw on chemical theory in support of their answers.

125. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their subject knowledge very well to probe students' understanding. 'Explain why this alcohol can be dehydrated while this one cannot.' Lessons move at a fast yet appropriate pace for the great majority of students. A small number of high attaining students could cope with the additional challenge of considering areas beyond the main lesson content, but teachers provide excellent opportunities outside lessons for them to extend their knowledge and understanding, for example by participating in the 'Chemistry Olympiad'. Support for students beyond lesson time is a strength of the department. One student said 'it is the little things that make a big difference', when referring to the help received in overcoming difficulties in 'chemistry clinics', and teachers' willingness to discuss at break and lunch-times topical issues that interest individual students. Teachers' enthusiasm for the

subject and care for students' learning engender positive attitudes, and lead to very good achievement.

126. Leadership and management are good. Teachers work well as a team, for example in helping students overcome difficulties. The head of department keeps detailed information about students' performance and uses it effectively in supporting those identified as under-achieving. Longer term development planning is improving and links with a local chemical industry are being established as part of the school's bid for science specialist college status.
127. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Examination results then were well above average, but now they are very high. ICT is used more effectively. Teaching remains expert, rigorous and enthusiastic.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very high.
- Students find work demanding because teachers encourage them to think beyond basic examination requirements.
- Very good teaching leads to very good achievement by students.
- Some lessons lack variety in approach, and a few higher achievers could achieve more.

Commentary

128. Examination results in 2002 were very high, and were similar in 2003. Overall, students did well in physics compared with their other subjects.
129. In Year 12 when students enter the sixth form, standards are above average overall, though wide ranging. Girls tend to be a little less secure in their knowledge, while Chinese students usually have very good recall of earlier work. Students achieve very well resulting in very high standards by Year 13. They usually work to full capacity throughout the full length of lessons, but some exceptions occur in Year 12 when a small number occasionally drift off task.
130. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their good subject knowledge very effectively, drawing on everyday examples to enliven the content. Lessons are usually well structured, helping students' learning because expected outcomes are clear. In Year 13, the teacher first explored students' perceptions of meanings of words such as stress and strain before drawing out working scientific definitions. Although students found the work demanding, they achieved very well because objectives were clear, the teacher checked their understanding at each stage and consolidated their learning by questions drawing on real examples. Students say that their understanding is deepened because teachers go beyond specification requirements. Good relationships and teachers' approachability result in students seeking help when needed. Although teachers plan further challenge for higher-attaining students, plans are not always put into effect and a small number could achieve more. A few lessons, particularly those timetabled outside laboratories, lack variety in approach, leading to students becoming less attentive from time to time.
131. Leadership and management are good. Teachers work well together as a team. Development planning identifies roles for individual teachers in further improvement and seeks to broaden the appeal of the subject with relevant visits. However, few links with local industrial or scientific installations have been established and planning lacks longer-term vision for future development.

132. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards then were well above national averages, while now they are very high. The use of ICT has improved and laboratories have been refurbished.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

There are 17 students in Year 12 and 16 in Year 13. Two lessons were sampled.

In 2002, the examination results in computing were very good compared with the national average. Students did not take ICT in Years 10 and 11, but despite this achievement was very good. The results for 2003 were better. Teaching and learning were at least good. In one lesson students were learning about the integrity of data and in the other about data flow symbols and diagrams very well. Students are eager to learn and their attitudes are excellent.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

133. Outside the computing courses, the use of ICT depends on subjects studied and access to computers. In economics lessons, students would benefit from using computers to produce economic models, rather than drawing by hand. Generally, students are proficient at word-processing and researching. The confidence of teachers in using computer programs varies, though it is improving.

HUMANITIES

Geography

There are 45 students following AS and 51 on A-level courses. Three lessons were observed.

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards on the A-level course are well above average.
- Students achieve well; their practical and fieldwork assignments are of a high standard.
- Teaching and learning are very good; teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject and an infectious enthusiasm which transmits itself to students.
- Leadership is very good; all students receive sympathetic, effective support.
- Limited ways of questioning sometimes limit effective learning.

Commentary

134. Standards are well above average. The most recent A-level examination results were well above average. All students gained a pass grade and 90 per cent gained grades A and B. The AS examination results were good: nearly two-thirds of a large group gained A and B grades. There were no significant differences in standards attained by students of different gender or ethnicity.
135. Current standards on AS and A-level courses are well above average. They are at least as good as at the time of the last inspection. These standards represent good achievement. Compared with most other A-level subjects, students start the courses with GCSE grades below the average in this school. Students show very good knowledge and understanding of topics in human and physical geography. Particular strengths include the ability to manage and synthesise a wide range of geographical information in different forms and from wide-ranging sources.
136. Overall, teaching is very good with some excellent features. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge and convey a sense of enthusiasm. These lead to students readily grasping more recent geographical ideas such as the politics of water supply and deforestation. Students' learning benefits from a combination of methods, such as reading texts, watching videos, lecture and note taking.
137. A minor weakness in teaching is that, when giving explanations to the class, questioning is not used to best effect to develop thinking and understanding. Students learn very well. The teachers' planning and organisation enables their success in undertaking a rigorous geographical inquiry or piece of fieldwork. The careful blend of environmental, physical and human topics enhances students' understanding of citizenship and develops greater cultural awareness.
138. The subject is led and managed very well. Careful sequencing of topics and themes and the meticulous planning and organisation of fieldwork make a significant contribution to teaching and learning. The departmental website provides additional excellent out-of-school support. The relative performance of all students is monitored carefully; overview of students' progress is comprehensive because all teachers share the teaching. While slightly cramped, the accommodation facilitates the sharing of ideas and good practice and day-to-day management.

History

There are 52 students in Year 12 and 35 in Year 13. Four lessons were observed.

The provision for history is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- Standards in public examinations are very high indeed.
- The quality of teaching is excellent.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Students develop their independent learning and research skills very well.
- Students fully appreciate the advice and support they are given.
- Scholarship is promoted through students' very good opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers.

Commentary

139. In recent years, results in both AS and A-level examination have been well above national averages and almost all students entered have achieved the highest grades. In the most recent A-level examination, for example, forty out of forty-one students entered achieved an A or B grade. The standards in work observed are also well above the national average. In Year 12, students use a very wide range of historical skills to produce structured arguments in very well written essays. They show a clear understanding of how political, social and economic factors affect history. In Year 13, students build on these strong foundations and develop independent learning and research skills. In both years, students are very articulate and hard working. As a result, their achievement levels are excellent.
140. These very high standards are reinforced by overall excellent teaching. Teachers use their subject knowledge to the full in helping students to develop their historical understanding. Students respond enthusiastically to the emphasis on rigour and the pleasure of scholarship which develop their higher order skills of analysis and investigation in discussion and written work. Tutorial sessions on how to structure essays to meet the highest grade criteria result in essays and notes of a very high quality. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers use a wide array of techniques to stimulate learning, including detailed and probing questions that encourage students to develop their reasoning skills. A notable feature is the excellent rapport between teachers and students so that the latter participate fully in debate and discussion. Students are motivated to succeed and appreciate the help and advice given.
141. Leadership and management are excellent. The performance of all students is monitored rigorously and teachers advise on how to achieve the highest grades. A wide range of resources in classrooms and the school library support their learning well. The department is developing the use of ICT and the Internet well. The subject makes a very strong contribution to the development of communication and citizenship skills.

Religious education

Two lessons were sampled. There is insufficient evidence to make a secure judgement on the course.

In Years 12 and 13, religious education is covered as part of the comprehensive general studies programme and a day's conference. Time is tight but plans show that the requirements of the new Essex Agreed Syllabus should be covered satisfactorily. Debates on moral and ethical issues add to what is done in class. Teaching and learning observed were good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

There are 4 students in Year 12 and 8 in Year 13. One lesson was sampled.

In 2002, the examination results in resistant materials were well above the national average. Results for 2003 were better. The number of students taking the course is small but rising. The teaching was very good. Students were working thoughtfully and very well on their final year project. They were learning to design and make individual products to high standards of accuracy and finish. Students were eager to learn and their attitudes were excellent.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

There are 30 students in Year 12 and 17 in Year 13.

Provision in art and design is **very good**. Four lessons were observed.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching results in very high examination results.
- Students' individual tutorials help them achieve very well.
- Excellent leadership promotes an enjoyable, industrious ethos and very good relationships.
- There is no dedicated sixth-form studio base.
- Teachers have to spend much time outside lessons preparing materials.

Commentary

142. All students entered in 2002 gained pass grades and over eight out of ten were graded A or B. In 2003 results were even better with nine out of ten gaining grades A or B. The subject has gained in popularity.
143. Standards are very high and achievement is very good. Students in Year 12 build effectively on prior attainment and settle quickly to sixth-form work. Their very well developed drawing and painting skills and keen sense of originality, enable them to express themselves. They strive hard to transcribe accurately into 2- and 3-dimensional form, draw upon their mathematical expertise to scale-up preliminary sketches and models into larger, well-proportioned paintings and sculptures.
144. Year 13 students demonstrate high levels of maturity when drawing the female nude figure from life. They extend and refine their already well-developed skills of analysis and close observation. The fewer female students make marginally better progress when drawing from life: greater flair and fluency of line shows their greater confidence in this genre. Successful former students return to give talks on the best courses and opportunities in art related careers.
145. Teaching is excellent. Teachers know students very well and make every effort to welcome students new to the school. Individual tutorials are built into every lesson. Teachers share their very high expectations and are excellent role models. They provide very high quality teaching materials and exemplars. As in the main school, teachers have to spend too much time, outside lessons, preparing materials.

Example of outstanding practice

Talented Year 13 students are challenged to pursue deeper insights. For example, in a unit of work on Illusion and Reality, a male student identifies what he sees as double standards in aspects of modern religious practice. The student shows very good insights into the power of narrative graphic imagery and has developed a highly personal and technically expert use of graphite pencil, to create black and white 'hyper-realistic' images of sometimes strangely disturbing portraits. The works show a deep moral concern with issues such as human hypocrisy and the effects that negative behaviours have on others, with titles such as 'ignorant of the damage done'.

146. Leadership is excellent. There are clear strategies for development. Very good organisational and management skills are evident in the positive relationships. The generous sharing of expertise amongst teachers benefits students who gain from a variety of approaches. There is no dedicated sixth-form studio base, which constrains safekeeping of uncompleted work between lessons.

Music

There are 16 students in Year 12 and 6 in Year 13. Several students also have instrumental tuition. Three lessons were observed.

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have high-level music skills and are very well motivated.
- Challenging teaching and thorough assessment support very good achievement.

Commentary

147. Standards are very high. Numbers of candidates for A and AS examinations, though now increasing, have been too low for national comparisons. All A-level candidates in 2002 gained A or B grades, as did over half of those taking AS. Results in 2003 maintain these high standards: over half at A level gained A or B and all did at AS. Performing ability is very high for most students. There is also outstanding work in composition and in analytical and historical studies. Most use music software with computers at home and in school.
148. Students achieve very well because they are well motivated, whether or not they intend to continue to study music. They appreciate the help they receive, ensuring seminars function well by good preparation and perceptive, helpful contributions. Mature attitudes and co-operation abound in lessons, and in extra-curricular work in which students use well the chances to take responsibility. They provide excellent role models for others.
149. Teaching and learning are very good. Expectations are high, but achievable and largely achieved. There is strong encouragement to learn independently. Teachers start by assuming knowledge of structures, keys and chord progressions, but provide immediate and thorough help when a gap in students' knowledge and experience comes to light, for example with diminished chords. Teachers work co-operatively very well. Feedback to students is prompt, detailed, and makes clear how to improve. Opportunities are occasionally missed to include listening experiences.
150. Leadership and management are excellent. Time and resources are juggled to maximise learning opportunities. Facilities are excellent in lessons and in students' study periods. Involvement of sixth form students in extra-curricular music activity is fostered extremely well. In one lunchtime, a rehearsal of a string quintet was directed from the 'cello by a student, a group prepared a 'Mikado' extract unaided, benefiting from female voices, and young rock guitarists were helped by a student.
151. Improvement is very good since the last inspection. Standards have been maintained and the accommodation has been greatly enhanced. Numbers studying music are increasing and some girls are attracted to the sixth form because of its provision for music.

Physical education

All students participate in Year 12 and most do so in Year 13. One Year 12 lesson was sampled.

Physical education is a compulsory subject in Year 12. In the lesson observed all students were fully committed and highly motivated. The involvement of sixth form students in helping with extra-curricular activities throughout the year is very good. Some Year 13 students help in the community or do private study on games afternoons. They, and the school, should consider whether this is in the best interest for their health.

BUSINESS

Economics

There are 53 students in Year 12 and 33 in Year 13. Four lessons were observed.

Provision in economics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above the national average.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students make very good progress in lessons.
- Students do not use ICT enough in lessons.

Commentary

152. Standards overall are well above average. In 2002, A-level results were well above the national average for the top grades of A and B, and all students passed, although results were below the school average. In 2003, the proportion of top grades was similar. Students achieve well over time. The proportion of A grades gained is often better than statistical predictions based on GCSE grades.
153. Standards in lessons and work seen of current Year 12 students are above national expectations at this early stage of their new course. There is no GCSE course, so that all start with little prior knowledge. Oral and mathematical skills of over half the students are well above average. Students' course work notes are neatly organised and, in class discussion, they define succinctly essential concepts such as elasticity.
154. Students in Year 13 made very good progress in lessons. Work seen was well above average except that students' use of ICT to present work and analyse numerical data was only average. ICT is not used enough to model cash flow and investment appraisal. Students' coursework projects show very good detail, thoroughly researched from textbooks and the *Internet*.
155. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge underpins enthusiastic class discussions, which encourage the excellently motivated students to respond keenly to teachers' well-focused questions. Lessons have a clear focus and very good pace, giving students ample scope for animated and critical discussion to reinforce concepts. Assessment procedures meet examining board requirements very well. Teachers' marking is thorough and regular, though weaker students are not always given enough written targets to help them improve. Room layouts constrain possible group work and presentations to improve key teamwork and communications skills.
156. Leadership and management are very good. The department has good links with the City. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with consistently high standards and high quality teaching. Teachers supported a student to prepare independently and successfully for two further business-related examinations. Analysis of students' examination results against potential requires more rigour. The department needs to increase the use of ICT.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

General Studies

In Year 12 there are 125 students and 100 in Year 13. Two whole and three part lessons were sampled.

There was insufficient evidence to provide a reliable overview of the provision.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are excellent. Eight out of ten of a very large entry gain grades A/B.
- Students learn to express their views on a large range of topical and moral issues.
- Guidance on structuring essays helps them in their other studies.
- Although several students participated in the debate in lessons, others were passive listeners, but diligent note takers.

Commentary

157. All students follow the Year 12 course and most continue to take the A-level examination in Year 13. The course is run as a carousel with students moving around a wide-ranging programme with a significant amount of specialist teaching. It covers the religious, moral and ethical topics required in the Essex Agreed religious education programme, general and topical knowledge, political, economic and, artistic areas. Staff help students to keep up-to-date on current affairs. Excellent examination results indicate its success as a course.
158. The teaching seen represented a small part of what is on offer. It was sound overall. In some Year 12 sessions the newly arrived students with English as a second language were not invited to participate and did not do so. Several explained that they found it too difficult to follow the texts and discussion.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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