

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **MARRIOTTS SCHOOL**

Chells, Stevenage

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117534

Headteacher: Mr Patrick Marshall

Lead inspector: Mr Richard Hancock

Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 November 2003

Inspection number: 259204

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11–19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	733
School address:	Telford Avenue Chells Stevenage Herts
Postcode:	SG2 0AN
Telephone number:	01438 351801
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Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Brooks
Date of previous inspection:	9 March 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Marriotts is an 11-18 mixed community comprehensive school situated in Stevenage. It was awarded specialist sports college status just over a year ago. It has won an artsmark award. It is also an Investors in People school. There are currently 733 students on the roll, a small rise from last year. Attainment is below average on entry and the school has been recognised as one in challenging circumstances. The backgrounds of students are mixed but are not of generally high social status. In the early 1990s the school roll was so low and the school's reputation so poor that the LEA considered closure. In the end, investment in a refurbishment programme saw the school survive, helped by a cohesive body of staff and students. The number of students eligible for a free school meal is above average. The percentages of students with special educational needs and of students with a statement of special educational need are above average. About eight per cent of students are from an ethnic minority background and about 13 per cent of the school's population is learning English as a second language. There are also some traveller children in the school. There are high levels of pupil mobility – 100 students joined the school last year, many of them students with very specific difficulties, often behavioural. There is a small sixth form of 89 students as part of the joint provision with neighbouring schools.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2715	Mr R Hancock	Lead inspector	Special educational needs
9115	Dr T Clarke	Lay inspector	
14871	Mrs B Buteux	Team inspector	English
30553	Mr R Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics
1249	Mr J Edge	Team inspector	Science
2183	Dr P Thompson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
15372	Mrs P Walker	Team inspector	History and Citizenship
10392	Mrs D Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography
17522	Mr N Stiles	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31821	Mr B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
18912	Mrs C Large	Team inspector	Religious education
13805	Mrs L Lowery	Team inspector	Design and technology
30695	Mrs G Dinan	Team inspector	Art and design
23499	Mr H Seymour	Team inspector	Music
10053	Mrs J Simms	Team inspector	Business (6 <sup>th</sup> Form) English as an additional language
18542	Mr G Griffin	Team inspector	Biology (6 <sup>th</sup> Form)

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The school provides an acceptable standard of education for its students** but overall standards are below average and, whilst some individual students achieve well, the school has serious weaknesses because the majority of students do not achieve well enough, especially in English, mathematics and science. Many students have weak literacy and mathematical skills and an immature attitude to learning, especially in Year 11. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school has shown signs of improvement recently under the effective leadership of a headteacher who has the support and respect of staff, students and parents. Because the cost of educating the students is higher than in most schools and the majority have not achieved enough by the time they leave, the school is not giving value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and a strong sense of purpose.
- Very effective systems are in place to ensure that students' welfare is a priority.
- Students with special educational needs are well cared for and all students are treated with equal respect which is increasing their confidence and raising self-esteem.
- There are very strong links with other schools and colleges and the wider community as part of the school's specialist sports college status.
- The overall standards achieved by students are not high enough.
- The school's approach to raising attainment lacks rigour.
- Data relating to students' performance is not effectively collated, analysed and interpreted so that it can be used by all teachers to improve performance.
- Assessment, including marking, is not used to good effect by all teachers to raise attainment.
- The attitudes of some students, especially in Year 11, prevent learning and depress standards.

Despite staffing difficulties, the school's response to the key issues identified at the time of the last inspection has been satisfactory. Special educational needs provision is now one of its strengths. The quality of teaching and learning has improved slightly but there is still a lack of challenge for higher attainers in some subjects. More time is still needed for music teaching and, although more time has been allocated to religious education, it is not enough. Overall standards have changed little but there are some signs of improvement – GCSE results for 2003 have risen sharply and students' achievement in Year 7 is also now good. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

**Overall, standards are below average throughout the main school and the majority of students are not achieving well enough, especially in English, science and mathematics.** Standards are higher in some other subjects and students' achievement is good in history and physical education and is very good in design and technology. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory and often good progress. Students also achieve well on the work-related learning courses in Years 10 and 11. Higher-attaining students mostly do well in English, geography and history but are not achieving enough in science and modern foreign languages.

Overall standards in the sixth form are below average and students need to achieve more but they are doing well in geography and design and technology.

Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall but a minority of students show poor attitudes to learning. Most students are prepared to take on responsibility and show that they can relate to other people and take initiative. **Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.** Attendance is still unsatisfactory but is improving and students' punctuality is satisfactory.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The overall quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is satisfactory.** It is often good in lessons in design and technology, physical education, history and art because teachers know these subjects well and help students to gain knowledge, develop skills and deepen their understanding. Whilst learning is also satisfactory, many students have still to learn the techniques of analysis, of writing at length, and how to observe and record findings accurately. The curriculum is satisfactory in Years 7 - 9 but is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because ICT is not used enough to enhance learning in most other subjects and there is insufficient time for the teaching of religious education.

The arrangements for students' care, welfare and safety are very good. Students receive their education in a very caring and supportive environment. This strength, identified at the last inspection, has been maintained and is enabling a large number of students to become more confident, to have more positive views about themselves and to be better disposed towards learning. Support from parents is good. Many are very appreciative of what the school does to support their sons and daughters and provide helpful support by ensuring that students attend school regularly and do their homework when it is set.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The leadership and management of the school is good.** The headteacher ensures strong direction. The leadership of the director of physical education and community sport ensures that the impressive new facilities are used well. The management of special educational needs ensures that the school is very inclusive and the management of work-related learning is effective in helping students to learn new skills. The school lacks a strong and rigorous action plan for raising attainment, the management of behaviour is not totally effective because some classes are undisciplined and performance data on students' progress is piecemeal and is not used systematically by teachers as a tool to improve achievement. The work of the governing body is effective in the support it has given to developments in the area of special educational needs and finance and the support it has given to the development of partnership arrangements, but it is not ensuring that the school fulfils all its statutory requirements.

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

Parents are very satisfied with the school. They have faith in the headteacher and staff and believe the school to be an improving one. Most of the students like the school, especially valuing the relationships they have with their teachers and the facilities for sport.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Prepare a rigorous and closely monitored action plan to help ensure that overall standards are raised throughout the school, including the sixth form.
- Ensure that data is systematically collected, collated, analysed and interpreted in such a way that it is used by all teachers to underpin the school's drive to raise standards.

- Ensure that the best assessment and marking practices are used consistently by teachers to help all students achieve more.
- Develop further the attitudes of all students so that they are positive towards learning and their expectations of success are high.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Improve provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11.
- Allocate appropriate amounts of time to the teaching of religious education and music.
- Provide a daily act of collective worship.



## SIXTH FORM SUMMARY

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The ethos of the sixth form is positive, current provision is well organized and plans for future expansion are good which means that **the overall provision is satisfactory**, despite the results of A-Level courses which are well below average. However, because the achievement of students is unsatisfactory overall and the costs are average, the sixth form is not cost effective but the school is working effectively to improve this situation.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The well managed arrangements with partnership institutions offer students a broad range of courses.
- The range of business studies courses are proving popular with students.
- The quality of the general studies course provides a good range of learning experiences.
- Very small numbers of students on some courses inhibit learning.
- Standards are well below average and students' achievement is not high enough.

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

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Provision in English is satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory and sometimes good and the English department is well managed but standards on A-Level courses are well below average and students' achievement is not high enough.
Mathematics	<b>Provision in mathematics is satisfactory.</b> Only a small number of students normally study mathematics. Teaching and learning is satisfactory and students have been successful on the AS course.
Science	<b>Provision in biology is unsatisfactory.</b> Leadership and management are unsatisfactory in biology because until quite recently students have not been given clear advice about expected grades or course choice. As a result some in Year 13 are now over-stretched. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory because standards have fallen, attendance remains an issue and provision is now unsatisfactory.
Information and communication technology	<b>Provision in ICT is satisfactory.</b> In 2002, students were not examined in ICT because courses were still in the process of being reorganized but in 2003 the unvalidated results of the AVCE single award examinations were above the national averages for 2002. Achievement was satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Humanities	<b>Provision in history is satisfactory.</b> A small number of students take history at A-Level and their achievement is satisfactory. Students make effective use of reading a range of the views of respected historians in order to inform their own evaluations.  <b>Provision in geography is good.</b> Standards in geography on A/S and A-Level courses are average and achievement is good. The subject is well taught. Leadership and management are good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Provision in design and graphics is good.</b> On the design and graphics course students achieve well. The teaching is very good and the subject is well managed.

Visual and performing arts and media	<p><b>Provision in art is good.</b> Standards in art are in line with national expectations. Students' achievement is good. Teaching is good.</p> <p><b>Provision in music is satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are satisfactory and sometimes good. Achievement is satisfactory.</p> <p>The media studies course is also well taught. Standards are below average but students' achievement is improving. It was not possible to observe the work of students studying drama.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	It was not possible to observe the work in sports studies with a partner school
Business	<b>Provision in business studies is satisfactory.</b> Students achieve well in VCE business studies by Year 13. Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good and the subject is well managed.
General education	<b>Provision in general studies is satisfactory.</b> The general studies course is taken by the largest number of students and, although results at A-Level have been well below average, students' minds have been broadened as the result of studying it. No lessons were observed.
<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

**The provision for support, advice and guidance in the sixth form is good.** The practical experience gained by students taking paid work and monitored by the school helps students to mature. The careful monitoring of their progress helps students and tutors to them to keep on track with their studies. Provision for careers is good and helps students to plan ahead. Students feel well supported and would not find it difficult to turn to someone for support if they had problems.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

**The sixth form is well led and managed.** Very good use is made of joint provision with other schools to offer a sufficiently broad range of education to the students. The accommodation for the sixth form is well thought out and well used. Good systems are in place for monitoring students' progress. A positive ethos has been created in which students can flourish. There is a lack of contact between students and the governing body. The sixth form has made good progress since the last inspection because the range of courses on offer has been extended and the overall ethos has improved.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

On the whole, students are positive about the sixth form. They like the friendly relationships between staff and students and feel well supported. They sometimes feel a little isolated when joining larger classes of students in partner schools but appreciate the way in which the school is working with other institutions to help ensure that the sixth form is viable.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Overall, standards are below average throughout the school and the majority of students are not achieving well enough, especially in English, science and mathematics. Standards are higher in some other subjects and in design and technology, history and physical education students are doing well.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well by the end of Year 9 in design and technology, history, religious education and physical education.
- Students with special educational needs mostly achieve well.
- Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science and students' achievement is not good enough in these subjects throughout the school.
- Literacy standards are below average and writing skills, in particular, are often very weak.
- Higher-attaining students do not reach high enough standards, and gifted and talented students, although identified by the school, do not show what they are fully capable of achieving.

#### Commentary

1. Most students start the school in Year 7 with standards which are below average. Many have weak literacy skills. When students reach the end of Year 11, the attainment of the majority is still below average and their achievement over time is not good enough. The highest standards are in design and technology and physical education.
2. Results in National Curriculum tests in 2002 were not nearly as good as those in 1997, just before the school was last inspected. In comparison with all maintained schools, the average points scored in each core subject were well below average. In comparison with similar schools they were well below average in English and mathematics and were very low in science. On the basis of students' prior attainment they were well below average in English but were very low in mathematics and science; on a range of 'value added' measures, overall test results were in the bottom five per cent of all schools. The trend of improvement was broadly in line with the national trend. Unvalidated National Curriculum test results for 2003 do not indicate significant improvement in English and science but show some possible improvement in mathematics.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	30.6 [29.9]	33.3 [33.0]
mathematics	31.7 [32.7]	34.7 [34.4]
science	28.9 [31.2]	33.3 [33.1]

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

3. GCSE examination results in 2002 for both boys and girls were well below average, both in terms of the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A\*/A – C and five or more grades at A\*/A – G. On the basis of prior attainment, results were below average in terms of five or more grades at A\*/A – C but were average for five or more grades at A\*/A – G. On a range of 'value added' measures the school's performance was either well below average or very low. The trend was below the national trend. The best results were in history, design and technology, vocational studies and physical education. Results were especially weak in drama

and geography. The unvalidated examination results for 2003 look to be much better and in particular show a considerable increase in the proportion of students achieving grades A\* - C.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	21 [27]	50 [48]
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	84 [85]	91 [91]
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	90 [93]	96 [96]
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	25.4	39.8

*There were 121 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. The standards of work seen in the school do not differ markedly from the test and examination results. At the end of Year 9 the standards of current work in English, mathematics and science are all below average. Given the starting points in Year 7, progress has not been sufficient and achievement in these subjects is not satisfactory. Achievement is better in some other subjects; for instance, in art, geography and music it is satisfactory and in design and technology, history, religious education and physical education it is good.
5. At the end of Year 11, the standards of current work in English, mathematics and science are all below average and achievement in these subjects continues to be unsatisfactory. Achievement is better in some other subjects such as design and technology, art and physical education but is not good enough in the school as a whole. Students' achievement is hampered by their weak literacy skills, a weakness which is not systematically addressed by the school. The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is also too uneven to ensure that students make consistent progress. Weaknesses in behaviour, lack of concentration in lessons, failure to do homework and poor attendance on the part of some students, also work against them achieving their potential. The school has identified the need to raise and maintain the overall levels of attainment of students but its plans for doing so are not strong enough to match the scale of need or pinpointed enough to identify its causes. Furthermore, the school's progress in this area has not been helped by staffing difficulties, especially in relation to the recruitment and retention of highly-qualified teachers.
6. Students with special educational needs mostly achieve well. For the most part, teachers and learning support assistants work hard and effectively to address the students' weaknesses which they carefully identify. Students who are learning English, together with other students in all subjects from an ethnic minority background and the children of travelling families, achieve satisfactorily because the school is effective in matching work to their needs. Higher-attaining students are not often challenged and they under-achieve. Students who are talented and gifted are not showing what they are capable of. The overall achievement of students is not very different from that described at the time of the last inspection and, because it needs to be higher, improvement in this area has not been satisfactory.

**Sixth form**

Overall standards are below average and students need to achieve more.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards of current work in some subjects show improvement.
- Results on most A-Level courses are well below average.

## Commentary

- The small numbers in the sixth form make for difficulties when comparing the school's performance with that of many other schools. Nonetheless, students' overall average points score for A-Level results in 2002 was very low, placing the school in the bottom five per cent of all schools in the country, a slight deterioration from the 2001 results. Results for English and biology were well below average at both AS and A-Level. Standards of current work in both subjects are too low and students are not achieving well enough. Very small numbers of students have followed an A-Level course in mathematics at the school in recent years. The two who were successful at AS-level in 2003 have moved to another school, so there are currently no second-year mathematics students. Results on the business course were below average.
- All results for 2003 have still to be validated but students' performance in the AVCE single award examinations in ICT was above the national averages for 2002, with over half the students obtaining A and B grades. Results on the business studies course show improvement and students did much better than predicted. Art is gaining in popularity as an A-Level option although the larger group of students presently in Year 12 shows a wide variation in ability. Standards are in line with national expectations and early indications suggest that the majority are working well towards meeting coursework requirements.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	94.1	95
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	0	36
Average point score per pupil	87.7	263.3

*There were 13 pupils in the year group.*

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

Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall. Students are prepared to shoulder responsibilities and show that they can relate to other people and take initiative. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Attendance is still unsatisfactory but is improving and students' punctuality is satisfactory.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school takes very good action to promote good attendance.
- The school deals effectively with bullying and racist incidents.
- Students like coming to school and are interested in the range of activities provided.
- Most students show respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others.
- The attitudes and behaviour of some students in Year 11 are unsatisfactory.
- In spite of the school's action, attendance is still unsatisfactory.

## Commentary

- Overall, students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory and the level of exclusions is falling, which is an improvement on the last inspection. When moving around the school, most students are polite, courteous and cheerful. The majority behave well in class. However, in the classroom, a significant minority of Year 11 students behave badly, which has an adverse effect on the learning of others. Their attitudes also are unsatisfactory. Most students like coming to school and are keen to take part in the many activities that the school provides, particularly the sports. A number of students answering the questionnaires referred to examples of bullying and racism in the school, but when interviewed said that the school was

strict about these forms of behaviour and that any incidents involving bullying or instances of racism were dealt with effectively. This area was not a matter of concern for most of the parents and nothing untoward was observed during the period of the inspection.

10. Students are prepared to be enterprising and take responsibility by serving on the sports council or as house captains. There is a school council which reports students' views to the governing body. A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 are training to become peer mentors with funding provided by the Prince's Trust. This will supplement the work of the school counsellor, who offers such training to staff. Some students are training as physical education instructors and work in local primary schools to train pupils. This is a good initiative for building up community links and helps develop independence and self-esteem, although some students still demonstrate weaknesses in this area. Most students like the school and appreciate the support they receive.
11. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. They are encouraged to show self-knowledge and spiritual awareness through assemblies and tutor periods and are encouraged to reflect through thought for the day. Students learn to show respect for others' feelings and beliefs and most respect their teachers.
12. The action which the school takes to improve attendance is very good. This was a key issue at the last inspection and it has now been addressed. Although the level of attendance is still unsatisfactory, it is improving year-by-year and last year it increased by 1.5 per cent. The unauthorised absence level is still falling. The improvement has come through the introduction of an electronic recording system, the introduction of a first day contact system, very good and effective co-operation with the education welfare officer (EWO) and the introduction of competition between tutor groups for good attendance. There are still a small number of school refusers, but these are referred to the EWO who visits students' homes, sometimes accompanied by the head of year. Students' punctuality is satisfactory.

### Sixth form

Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Attendance and punctuality are both satisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good behaviour and attitudes displayed by most sixth form students.

### Commentary

13. Students show a good level of maturity. They behave well around the school and mostly show respect and courtesy to staff. Relationships are good with tutors. They show initiative and take responsibility. Students in the sixth form have their own school council which presents a sixth form perspective of students' views of the school. Unusually, there is also a sports council which is working effectively. Students show initiative by taking paid work outside lesson time which is monitored by the school. One or two students have not adapted easily to life in the sixth form and can be truculent, especially over matters of dress, but the majority are approachable, appreciate the new flexibility which the sixth form setting brings and talk easily and confidently with adults. Students' attendance and punctuality are satisfactory and last year were higher than that in the main school. Attendance has remained at well over 90 per cent so far in the current year.

### Attendance in 2001/2002 (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	10.1
National data	7.8

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.7
National data	1.2

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group

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

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
600	282	4
2		
5		
7		
7		
8		
2		
11		
1		
10		
11		
4		
11		
23		

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

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

The overall quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is also satisfactory. The curriculum is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 but is satisfactory in Years 7-9. The school is well led and managed. The school's partnership with parents and the wider community is very well developed.

### **Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There was one lesson in which the teaching and learning was excellent. It was very good or excellent in just under one fifth of all lessons and was unsatisfactory or poor in just under one in twelve lessons.

#### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 134 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	23 (17%)	52 (39%)	47 (35%)	7 (5%)	4 (3%)	0

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Lessons are well planned and organized and this helps teachers to make the best use of time.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects.
- Good quality teaching and learning in Year 7 is getting students off to a good start in the school.
- Some teachers find it difficult to establish discipline in the classroom and this limits students' achievement.

- Inconsistent quality in teaching results in unacceptably varied learning experiences for students.
- Little systematic attention is given to the literacy needs of students so they do not improve enough.

## Commentary

14. In the excellent lesson, and in those lessons which were very good, teachers established a brisk pace at the outset, often by introducing students to a lively learning activity which captured their interest and focused their minds. A related objective would then be introduced and presented in such a way that the students had an opportunity to learn through developing and practising their skills, such as writing haiku or epitaphs in English, preparing an illustrative slide in ICT, playing a role in religious education or planning their own movements in physical education. These lessons were rounded off well by teachers and students, working together to confirm what had been learned. Most of the very good teaching and learning was in Year 7 and there was only one very good lesson in Year 8, illustrating that, whilst it is good that students have such positive experiences so very early in their school careers, there are also inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in the school which could prevent it from building strongly on its early successes.
15. In lessons which were good or better, well over half of all the lessons seen, teachers used time well, planned lessons carefully, shared with students important and accurate knowledge about subjects, and expected, and secured, high standards of behaviour. Homework was used well to help students reinforce earlier learning or to begin to open up new topics of interest. Their work was regularly and carefully marked and, in the case of history, students were accurately informed as to the National Curriculum levels they had reached and provided with excellent guidance as to what they had then to do to reach the next level. This was an example of outstanding practice because it was keeping the students informed as to their progress and motivating them to learn further.
16. In lessons which were unsatisfactory, the teaching was dull and students were bored and often resorted to bad behaviour. If the teacher's management of the class was especially weak, or the students were particularly difficult to handle, behaviour deteriorated still further and the lessons became poor. About one in twelve lessons in the main school came into this category.
17. Most students do not find learning easy and, whilst teachers often have to work very hard to create a good ethos, there were some good examples of very effective learning. These were at their best in design and technology because learning was developed through teachers' close observation of students' progress and constant feedback, sometimes in the form of detachable adhesive notes placed on their work advising them how the work could be improved. Students found these very helpful, followed the advice and added to their work. Students have learned to use technical language, had used the internet for research and some had used digital cameras.
18. Higher and moderately attaining students in Year 9 enjoyed learning about number because their teacher was knowledgeable and enthusiastic about mathematics and explained concepts in ways that they understood. In a geography lesson in the same year on the climate of Japan, students knew how to search for evidence, present findings and could carry out more complex investigations. In a PSHE lesson on racism, students in Year 8 quickly grasped the idea of how a stereotype developed from their knowledge of racial and cultural differences. Their observation of a telling video clip showed just how alert they were to behaviour which was prejudiced or discriminatory.
19. In a science lesson in Year 9, some students showed that they have still to develop their powers of observation, to learn how to handle equipment properly, to be punctilious about aspects of safety, and to record findings with precision. The standard of work in many subjects also shows that significant numbers of students throughout the school have not learned yet how to organise their ideas effectively and how to write at length. The learning of many



students is also adversely affected by their immature attitude to study. Concentration lapses after a short time, they are easily distracted and lose the thread of lessons.

20. Students with special educational needs mostly learn well because teachers identify their needs accurately and work on them systematically so that they make good progress. Those whose learning needs are most acute learn at the greatest pace, often because of the relationships they build up with the well trained support staff. Students with behavioural difficulties also learn well and benefit from the calm manner of staff and the settled atmosphere in the learning support area. Some students, often boys, whose literacy skills are weak, do not make the progress they should when they are part of a large class and do not get the benefit of the individual attention which is often case in the learning support area. Gifted and talented students are rarely challenged. Students from travelling families and those students who are learning English as a second language are well integrated with other students and mostly enjoy their learning and make good progress. This is because the school welcomes all students, analyses their learning needs, makes appropriate responses and treats them with the same respect as all other students.

### **Sixth form**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and is sometimes good and very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers show good subject knowledge which helps students to extend their own knowledge.
- The good levels of lesson planning help teachers to make the best use of time.
- In some lessons students do not develop a sense of independence because they do not get enough opportunities to learn for themselves.

### **Commentary**

21. Altogether, 24 whole lessons or significant parts of lessons were observed in Years 12 and 13 and the overall quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory. Very good teaching and learning were observed in some lessons in design and technology, geography and art.
22. In most lessons, teachers demonstrated good knowledge of their subjects, the ability to devise effective learning tasks for students and a readiness to give feedback to help students improve. Lessons had clear objectives and a strong sense of purpose and students were left in no doubt as to what the learning was about. In some lessons, a didactic style of teaching did not allow sufficient opportunities for students to develop learning for themselves. In lessons which were satisfactory, teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge but tended to dominate in the classroom which meant that students were in danger of becoming heavily reliant on them. In better lessons teachers used effective question and answer techniques to keep students on their toes and develop independence of thought.
23. Some students find learning a challenge. They receive good support from their teachers but frequent absence and poorly developed literacy skills sometimes take their toll. For such students the elementary tasks set by teachers are not appropriate at this level and some teachers have still to find ways of helping the less able and less motivated students to grasp the ideas and concepts which need to characterise sixth form work.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum is satisfactory in Years 7-9 but is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because it does not meet statutory requirements in ICT and religious education. The school does not hold a daily act of collective worship for all students. The school's innovative approach to curriculum planning has led to the introduction of a successful work-related learning course in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum is especially good in physical education. Although adapted successfully for students with

learning difficulties, the overall curriculum does not offer enough challenge to higher-attaining students or to those who are gifted and talented.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The work-related course for students in Years 10 and 11 provides very good training.
  - The curriculum in physical education is particularly broad and innovative.
  - The school has a flexible approach to curriculum planning and monitors developments closely.
  - The school does not fulfil the statutory requirements for teaching ICT in Years 10 and 11.
  - There is insufficient time for teaching religious education in Years 10 and 11 and music from Year 7 to Year 9.
  - The curriculum is adapted for students with special educational needs but does not offer sufficient challenge for higher attainers or for gifted and talented students.
24. The curriculum is broad and balanced in Years 7 to 9 as all National Curriculum subjects are taught for appropriate amounts of time. All students also study drama which makes a good contribution to their personal development. They have an opportunity to study two foreign languages which is a good feature for those students who show an aptitude for learning them. All students have lessons in PSHE which make a further positive contribution to their personal development. The school complies with the requirements for teaching sex education. ICT is taught as a separate subject and some good use is made of it to enhance learning in other subjects but not in all, music being a notable exception. The school is in the early stages of introducing the National Strategy but this has still to be fully integrated with the curriculum. The school undertook professional development work on literacy development in 2001 but there was little evidence of its impact. 'Catch Up' classes are held for some students and improved reading ages indicate that they meet with some success. The school also holds summer schools to help some students improve their basic skills and runs classes for parents. However, there is no day-by-day systematic approach to the development of students' literacy skills on a subject basis which is a weakness of the curriculum.
25. In Years 10 and 11 the school is not complying with statutory regulations for the teaching of ICT because the subject is neither properly planned to make an important contribution to students' learning in subjects nor is it systematically assessed. Insufficient time is allocated to religious education to enable the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to be covered.
26. The work-related learning course is both innovative and effective. Some 68 students are currently on this course and the close monitoring undertaken by the school shows that students are very motivated and make good progress. Overall, the range of applied and vocational courses is satisfactory. Half a million pounds has been awarded to the school and its partners by the Learning and Skills Council to explore the viability of a students' apprenticeship scheme. A course in leisure and tourism has been introduced in the current year and is working well. As part of their course, students spend one afternoon a week at the local college. The flexible approach allows students to take entry level and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). The introduction of engineering last year as a vocational course is another positive innovation, although the content is proving difficult for some lower-attaining students and the school is reviewing the 'admission criteria' to this course.
27. Students who need particular help with their social development are well served by the school's effectively organised ASDAN course. A weakness is that those who are higher attainers, or who are gifted and talented, do not get appropriate opportunities to extend their knowledge or deepen their understanding. The curriculum at this key stage does not provide the strongest basis for progression to sixth form studies; for instance there is no business studies course, although this is offered at sixth form level.
28. The physical education curriculum is very good, and a particularly innovative aspect of the curriculum is the delivery of citizenship through physical education and the community sport curriculum. This is in its early stages but a promising start has been made. Extra-curricular

activities are strong in sport and are satisfactory overall. The curriculum is reviewed annually which is a good feature. The school also sees the need to be innovative and flexible, especially when planning its courses in Years 10 and 11. Despite the weaknesses in the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, the overall curriculum has improved since the last inspection to the extent that it is now more suited to the needs of the students, but progress in curriculum development has been unsatisfactory overall because of the inadequate provision for ICT, religious education and music.

29. The curriculum provides for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Overall provision is satisfactory. There is scope for them to reflect, for instance, in assemblies when the headteacher gives them opportunities to listen to music and readings on 'The Sound of God'. Other opportunities for reflection are provided through weekly themes and sayings. Although practice in these is variable in tutor groups, some good examples of their use were observed in the inspection. Students' spiritual and moral development is strengthened in some lessons such as religious education where students discuss moral and social issues and reflect on their own responses to them, but it is not a strong feature of the curriculum at large. More generally in the life of the school, students have opportunities to show concern for the needs of others and respond generously to charitable causes, such as the £3000 raised for Motor Neurone disease.
30. Provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory. They have some opportunities to develop their understanding of the richness and diversity of their own and other cultures. They do this in religious education by exploring different cultural myths about creation. They compare beliefs and stories from the Yanomani tribes from the Brazilian Rainforests with those of Aborigines and the Native American peoples. After-school drama, music clubs and productions enrich cultural understanding, as did a recent visit from an African Dance group which helped students to gain valuable insights into unfamiliar dance rhythms and routines. In geography, students gain good understanding of the differences and similarities of life in Eastern and Western cultures when studying the peoples of Japan and Italy. In the sixth form, students develop good understanding of the cultural impact of migration in the United States of America.
31. Students get satisfactory opportunities to develop their social skills through team work in sports, group presentations in drama, role plays in learning, meeting as tutor groups and in assemblies, through serving on the school council and taking part in school visits. Students who are most in need of helpful guidance in how to relate to others are greatly helped by taking part in the activities organised by the school under the auspices of ASDAN.
32. The school has made improvements to its accommodation which have had a positive impact overall and some particularly beneficial ones in physical education and science. Resources are satisfactory overall although there are shortages in some subjects.
33. A major factor preventing the school from offering a curriculum of quality has been the difficulties it has encountered with staffing which has had a negative impact on quality in modern foreign languages, ICT, mathematics and science. The school does not meet statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. Against an unhelpful backdrop of staffing difficulties, the headteacher has worked closely with the governing body to improve the staffing of the school with mixed success. The science department, for instance, long a cause for concern, is now well led, but some other departments, such as the ICT department, still lack convincing direction. Issues connected with staffing, including the difficulties facing the school when it needs to recruit specialist staff of calibre, continue to inhibit its overall progress.

### **Sixth form**

Provision is satisfactory. By working with partner institutions, the school is able to offer a broad range of courses to cater for the diverse needs of its students.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The well managed arrangements with partnership institutions offer students a broad range of courses with an appropriate vocational emphasis.
- The range of business studies courses are proving popular with students.
- The quality of the general studies course provides a good range of learning experiences.
- Very small numbers of students on some courses inhibits learning.

## **Commentary**

34. The sixth form curriculum is delivered in partnership with other institutions. The school is moving towards more vocational and applied courses such as an AVCE in science and a BTEC in physical education. The existing quality and range meets the needs and aspirations of students and partnership arrangements are managed effectively. The school is introducing a good range of suitable business studies courses.
35. There is a good general studies course which broadens students' experience. This course includes opportunities for students to consider issues of belief and value, including those of religion. In addition, the school is planning a joint religious education conference day with a neighbouring school's sixth form students. Provision for religious education is therefore satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. The overall curriculum is also satisfactory and plans for its future development are good but the small numbers of students on some courses restrict learning because there are too few students to initiate discussion and debate.

## **Care, guidance and support**

The arrangements for students' care, welfare and safety are very good. The school's provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is good. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good. Students receive their education in a very caring and supportive environment. This strength, identified at the last inspection, has been maintained.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety.
- The very good work-related education programme for students in Years 10 and 11.
- The excellent arrangements for first aid and the administration of medication.
- The provision of support, advice and guidance.
- The induction arrangements for students.
- A member of the school council attends governors' meetings.
- The careers education programme in the main school is good.

## **Commentary**

36. The provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. The school has appropriate procedures in place for child protection, with the requirements for students who are cared for being fully met. The staff are kept up to date with procedures and know which members of staff to go to with their concerns. The school maintains close contact with the social services department. The school is very effective in monitoring health and safety. A senior member of staff has overall responsibility and reports regularly to the relevant committee of the governing body. The arrangements for administering first aid are a strength, including the care for sick students and the administration of medication. The recording of these is meticulous and the provision is excellent.
37. The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is good. The work of a very strong pastoral team of form tutors, heads of year and the deputy headteacher ensure that each student has a good and trusting relationship with more than one adult at the school.

This became clear when some students said that if they had problems they would go to their form tutors, while others said that they would go straight to the head of year. As the heads of year and form tutors move up with their students, by the end of Year 11, students are extremely well known to many adults. The close contact between the pastoral team and faculties, as well as the regular meetings between student, parent and form tutor, ensures that both students and parents are made aware of the students' targets, both academic and pastoral, which include behaviour. This support is particularly effective for vulnerable students. A good induction programme is in place with a deputy headteacher and staff visiting the feeder primary schools during Year 6 as well as the more formal arrangements in the summer term.

38. The school seeks students' views through the school council and sports council, and a representative of these attends meetings of the governing body. Changes in school uniform have come about through students' initiatives. Careers education starts in Year 7 and is tutor directed. In Year 8 the programme is in the hands of the form tutor and teachers of PSHE. As they move on through Year 10, students receive appropriate advice on their GCSE options. In Years 10 and 11, careers education becomes part of PSHE and more academic students have the opportunity to visit the University of Hertfordshire. The school also arranges mock interviews with local employers, has an annual two-day 'insight into industry' for all Year 9 students, and works closely with Connexions. Work experience takes place at the start of Year 11. Overall, this provision is good.
39. One of the main strengths of the school is the work-related education programme for students which starts in Year 10. Students are offered taster courses, in conjunction with the North Hertfordshire College or the nearby training provider. This programme started in a small way six years ago and other secondary schools in Stevenage are now involved. The school and its partners have been awarded a £500,000 grant from the Learning and Skills Council to develop apprenticeship schemes for students in the 14-19 age range. The overall effect of the work-related learning is that more students are staying on at school to develop their careers, with a number qualifying at NVQ level 1 and 2 in the vocational subjects offered through the taster courses.

## **Sixth form**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The good relationships between students and their tutors creates a harmonious atmosphere.
- The monitoring of students' progress helps them to keep on track with their studies.
- Provision for careers is good and helps students to plan ahead.

### **Commentary**

40. The provision for support, advice and guidance in the sixth form is good and this depends very much on the good relationships between students and their tutors. Their progress is monitored closely and students readily seek the advice of their tutor. Through their tutor time students discuss the outcome of previous lessons and discuss what they should do next. This was observed during one registration period in Year 12.
41. Although the school does not seek the views of students through regular questionnaires, there is a separate sixth form council which acts as a conduit between the students and the school. Careers education in the sixth form is good and is effectively carried out through the Connexions agency. Students do not have general work experience in the sixth form but some do get opportunities for this when it is related to the courses they are taking. Most students, however, take on paid work during the time they are not in school. The timetable allows for this and gives students a good experience of real work and in itself helps to provide the students with information on careers. Further support for students' deciding on potential career opportunities is scheduled to take place when the student-apprentice scheme is in place.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school goes out of its way to ensure that parents are kept closely in touch with students' progress and all major school developments.
- The school is very active in working with outside agencies of all kinds to enhance students' learning.
- The school works effectively with other schools and colleges to increase the learning opportunities for its own students.
- The management of shared provision for work-related learning is very good and helps the students to get the maximum benefit from specialized vocational courses.

### Commentary

42. The school's links with parents have improved since the last inspection and are improving further. Parents have very positive views of the school. They especially like the quality of care their sons and daughters receive and are very appreciative of the headteacher's commitment to school improvement. Some parents, initially disappointed when their sons and daughters were allocated to Marriotts School, have totally changed their minds and are now happy and proud that they are at this school.
43. The school provides good information for parents, particularly about students' progress. Attendance at parents' evenings is increasingly good, and the school is very conscientious in following up individual students' progress with any parents who do not attend. The school arranges parents' workshops on aspects of learning which is a good initiative by the senior management team. The school also seeks parents' views by way of a parent focus group. There is no longer a Friends Association as there was at the time of the last inspection, but a small group of parents support the school by providing tea and coffee at the Christmas entertainment. The school hopes to exploit this to form a new Friends Association.
44. While the school has had good links with the community in the past, the recently acquired status of sports college has greatly increased these. A number of local and national businesses support the school well by providing the personnel for mock interviews held annually at a local training centre. Employers help the school with the *Insight into Industry* days provided annually for Year 9 students and give feedback on this. The school also has good links with other agencies such as social services, the police and the health service. Overall the school's links with the community are now very good.
45. The strong links that are being developed in the area through the work of the director of physical education and community sport and the partnership development manager are beginning to have beneficial effects on teaching and learning, the dissemination of good practice, developments for gifted and talented students and local groups, including students with disabilities.
46. The links with other schools and colleges are also very good. The school has very good links with local primary schools through its induction programme to help new entrants adjust to their new school environment. These links have improved recently, partly because of the use of the sports centre, but mainly because students at Marriotts train as sports coaches and visit primary schools to provide training for their pupils and to act as role models.
47. Links with the colleges are also very good, particularly through the shared provision of work-related education. The management of this is very effective due to the efficiency of the

school's co-ordinator. The links are also very good with the colleges which offer vocational settings and other training facilities. Very good links have been forged with other secondary schools through the 14 – 19 pathfinder initiative to develop the curriculum, and the school works effectively with them to provide professional development on a shared basis.

48. As with the main school, many of the very good links with the community in the sixth form come through the sports college. The school is working very hard to ensure that sixth form students benefit from a broad education by working in collaboration with other schools which also need to share provision. The school has made a good start with this initiative but there is some way to go before the provision is broad enough to compare with what a well developed sixth form is able to offer.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The leadership and management of the school is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership provided by the headteacher provides strong direction.
- The leadership of the gymnastics centre ensures that it is well used by the school and the wider community.
- The management of special educational needs ensures that the school is very inclusive.
- The management of work-related learning is effective in helping students to learn new skills.
- The school lacks a strong and rigorous action plan for raising attainment.
- The management of behaviour is not totally effective because some classes are undisciplined.
- Performance data on students' progress is piecemeal and is not used systematically by teachers as a tool to improve achievement.

### **Commentary**

49. At the time of the inspection the headteacher had been in post for eighteen months, after a brief interregnum following the departure of the previous headteacher. In that time he has been able to win the confidence and support of parents, despite the loyalty that many of them showed to his predecessor. Many students are respectful of his whole-hearted endeavours to improve the school. He also enjoys the full support of the staff, governing body and the local education authority. The senior management is a cohesive team of professionals working closely with the headteacher to bring about improvement.
50. The school's overall planning is satisfactory. The improvement plan, together with the plan for raising attainment, are basically sound because they identify tasks and who is responsible for taking action as well as providing criteria for monitoring and appropriate time scales and cost implications. However, the plans themselves are not strong enough to deal with the scale of the school's needs, especially where they are severe. Literacy levels are low and the school's means for addressing them are not strong enough. The misbehaviour of a significant minority of students, especially in Year 11, shows that the management of behaviour is not fully effective.
51. The management of students with special educational needs is very good because students' needs are carefully identified and addressed and record keeping is of a high order. The school also keeps close track of its casual admissions and does its best to provide a new start for these students, many of whom have a long history of behavioural and learning difficulties. The school has some remarkable successes to its name in terms of effectively helping students overcome severe learning needs and to flourish. There are some gifted and talented students in the school but as yet the challenge they present has not been addressed by the school so it cannot be sure they are near to fulfilling their potential.

52. The curriculum is well managed, especially for those students with strong vocational interests and those for whom learning needs to be flexible. For instance, students who find that they learn best at a slower pace and in different settings with more intensive staff attention are well served by the ASDAN course. The work-related learning that a significant number of students undertake is a model of good practice because it maximizes local opportunities and provides authentic experiences for students in Years 10 and 11 whose interests are already turning to the world of work.
53. The superlative facilities of the gymnastics centre are extremely well managed and the school is making very good use of what they have to offer and is doing justice to its sports college status. Although it has been awarded the artsmark award, the school's work in drama and art does not have anything like the same high profile as sport and, despite some enthusiasts, the arts themselves are not playing a very large part in the lives of the students.
54. The governing body is working closely with the headteacher and providing good all round support. Its members show interest in what is happening in the school, especially in the area of special educational needs, and have a broad knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. However, there is not enough contact with the sixth form and the students spoken to by inspectors were unaware of what a school's governing body does.
55. The governing body is not ensuring that the school complies with the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship, time allocations for music and religious education are inadequate, and ICT is not taught or assessed according to requirements in Years 10 and 11. As a result, the governance of the school, despite some good qualities, is unsatisfactory.
56. The governing body provides good guidance on expenditure but this is nonetheless well above average when compared with other schools. This is due to the distinctive profile of the courses offered and large grants received to support the challenging circumstances of the school, its specialist sports college status, the learning support unit and the Key Stage 3 strategy. The school endeavours to use best value for money practices. Tenders are received from approved suppliers and the one offering the best value is chosen. Whilst the school's accounts meet requirements, have been audited by the local authority and independent auditors recently and the overall financial management of the school is good, because it is costing so much more to educate students than in most other schools and because the achievement of so many is unsatisfactory, the school is not now giving satisfactory value for money.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2, 991,735	Balance from previous year	135,966
Total expenditure	3,151,796	Balance carried forward to the next	-24,094
Expenditure per pupil	4,483		

**Sixth form**

The sixth form is well led and managed.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The overall monitoring of students' work is helping tutors to keep track of their progress.
- Very good use is made of joint provision with other schools.
- Students' achievement is not good enough.
- There is a lack of contact between students and the governing body.



## Commentary

57. The sixth form is well led and managed. The head of sixth, who is also head of business studies and is the school's GNVQ co-ordinator, has a good grasp of the issues facing the small sixth form. He has helped to create a good balance between relaxation and application to work. A good balance has also been struck in decision-making between the views of students and those of the school. He has earned the respect of students. Systems for monitoring students' progress are good. Very good use is made of joint provision with other schools to expand provision for students and to help with efficiency. Plans for the future expansion of the sixth form are appropriate.
  
58. Accommodation is adequate and well organized with good provision for students to work quietly, to socialize and to have access to computers. They also have very good access to the gym centre. The costs of the sixth form are similar to those of other schools but the sixth form is not subsidised by the main school. There is little contact between students and the governing body which is a weakness because the maturity of the students is not fully harnessed to help the school develop in a variety of positive ways. Because the achievement of students is mostly unsatisfactory overall and the costs are average, the sixth form is not cost effective, but because current provision is well organized and because the plans for future expansion are good, the overall provision is satisfactory.

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

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enthusiastic teachers are committed to raising standards.
  - The strong team of teachers work cooperatively to improve achievement.
  - Students' learning is well supported by caring teaching assistants.
  - Teachers produce their own units of study aimed at improving the quality of learning.
  - Results are not high enough in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.
  - A significant number of students, particularly boys, are not achieving as well as they could.
  - Standards of writing across all year groups need substantial improvement.
  - There is no literacy co-ordinator responsible for integrating literacy skills across the curriculum.
59. Standards of attainment are too low. Results obtained in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are well below average. Standards of work observed during the inspection matched these low levels of attainment. This is partly because a large proportion of students enter school in Year 7 with standards below national expectations. This situation is exacerbated by the very low attainment of significant numbers of casual admissions throughout the school year. Many students do not make sufficient progress during Years 7, 8 and 9 to catch up to standards expected for their age groups. As a result, attainment remains too low and students do not achieve as well as they should in the GCSE examinations. However, unvalidated results for 2003 suggest that students' performance is improving at GCSE level and LEA data indicates that attainment in national tests matches similar schools.
60. Most students respond well to their enthusiastic teachers but small groups of students persistently limit the learning of others by disruptive behaviour in lessons. This problem occurs most frequently in Year 11 and sometimes in Year 9 which seriously impedes achievement in the National Curriculum. These patches of poor behaviour are a contributory cause of the low attainment.
61. Learning is satisfactory overall. The school has introduced a system of units of work tailored to students' needs and designed to capture their interest. As a result, there is an upturn in the quality of students' learning which is reflected in improved results in 2003. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some good and very good lessons seen. Students learn best when teachers stimulate their interest with appropriate activities but also allow them time for reflection and review of the tasks undertaken. Most students enjoy their lessons and explain their ideas and opinions with growing confidence. Higher-attaining students develop discussion skills and defend their points of view vigorously. They read fluently with a good understanding of the topic or story. Average-attaining students read competently but lower-attaining students struggle to make sense of their texts.
62. Overall achievement is unsatisfactory because students do not have enough opportunities for sustained writing practice during their lessons. Spelling and punctuation are often weak and vocabulary is limited and consequently written work is poor. Nonetheless, by the end of Year 11, higher-attaining students plan and draft their work to achieve writing of good quality which is informative and entertaining to read. Older students appreciate their teachers' detailed marking of their work and the careful guidance given because they understand the grades they are working towards and what they must do to succeed. Students' work is assessed

objectively but assessment schemes are not sufficiently integrated with whole school systems to provide a profile of each student's performance through the school. Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make sound, and often good, progress, because they are well supported by the dedicated team of learning support assistants. Most teachers manage their classes confidently using a range of teaching strategies to steer students towards making their own learning discoveries from the texts of plays, poems, novels and non-fiction material. Learning is unsatisfactory when teaching is dull or students are not sufficiently challenged and, as a result, achievements are less than they should be.

63. The large department of well qualified teachers is well led and most resources are used satisfactorily although students do not use ICT facilities sufficiently to provide alternative methods of presenting their work. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory because schemes are being implemented to meet the issues raised. However, achievement is too low and teachers should pursue the most effective of their new strategies to ensure that all students reach the best standards possible for them.

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

64. The development of students' literacy skills is not co-ordinated across the school. Consequently, students' competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing varies across departments. Overall literacy skills are not developed sufficiently and as a result students' presentation of oral and written work is inhibited in most curriculum areas. However, in the subjects where teachers encourage students to refine their skills of speaking and writing, students' work is informative and entertaining. Students use language competently within the limits of their own vocabulary, expressing themselves adequately for their own purposes. Although they have not developed sufficient skills to speak confidently to a variety of audiences, higher-attaining students contribute to class discussions, explaining their viewpoints coherently, and this is reflected in their written work. Overall, writing skills are weak, spelling and punctuation are inconsistent and the quality of presentation is haphazard. In subjects where writing is well supported by planning frameworks or practice in the use of subject specific terminology, students record their knowledge and understanding effectively. The majority of students can understand the texts and material they study in class and higher-attaining students read fluently. But too many lower-attaining students struggle to make sense of what they are reading so they lose interest and give up trying.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

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

- Teachers' knowledge of the language is consistently good.
- Standards are well below average and not high enough.
- Teachers do not insist on good behaviour and this affects the quality of learning.
- The current uptake in Years 10 and 11 is very small.
- Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

#### **Commentary**

65. Students in Year 7 learn French and in Years 8 and 9 higher-attaining students also learn German. Teachers' assessments of students' work at the end of Year 9 suggest that the overall level of work is well above average. Work seen during the inspection does not support this judgement. Students' understanding of the foreign language, especially French, is well below average because the language is used sparingly in the classroom. Oral skills are poorly developed and written skills lack confidence and breadth of knowledge of vocabulary. Work is not often presented neatly.

66. In Years 10 and 11 students have the opportunity to continue with French and German. There are currently no students taking French and only nine taking German in Year 10. Numbers are greater in Year 11, but still relatively low. By the end of Year 11, students' overall level of attainment is well below average. Overall, students' attainment and achievement are unsatisfactory. However, in the latest 2003 unvalidated GCSE results, attainment is slightly above the national average for grades A\* – C. This is because a very small number of students took GCSE and the German entry was drawn from higher-attaining students. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades was well below average.
67. By Year 11 students begin to identify specific information and tenses in listening material. They have more opportunity to undertake more extended writing in German than in French and this leads to relatively greater familiarity with and manipulation of the language. However, little evidence was seen during the inspection of consistently high quality work.
68. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Teachers do not use the foreign language sufficiently in the classroom and they do not present sufficient challenge to students. The behaviour and attitudes of a significant number of students, especially in Years 7 and 9, seriously affect the quality of learning. Teachers' expectations are generally not high enough to eliminate these unsatisfactory attitudes in all classes.
69. Leadership and management is unsatisfactory. The departmental leadership and management has not secured any improvement in the three issues identified at the last inspection. Students continue to lack confidence in speaking and writing because English is used too frequently; appropriate challenge is not yet planned and delivered for higher-attaining students; consistent use is not made of the language, especially French, in lessons. The rate of improvement is unsatisfactory. However, a new head of department has recently taken up post and she is already beginning to put in place plans to improve the quality of provision and standards. In order to secure improvement, matters such as current standards throughout the school, the preponderance of part-time teachers, the three on-going issues from the last inspection, the use of ICT to support learning, the use of effective assessment procedures to monitor learning and progress and the uptake of modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11 will need to be addressed.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers successfully develop students' understanding through oral response to questions.
- Number work is given a strong emphasis.
- Resources are inadequate for supporting learning, particularly for homework.
- Too few students benefit from the good teaching practices which some teachers employ.
- Standards and achievement have been adversely affected by changes in staffing.

### **Commentary**

70. National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well below average and lower than in the previous year. Students' standards were very low compared with their attainment when they were eleven. Current standards are better but are still below average. The results of GCSE examinations in 2002 were significantly below the national average by the equivalent of one grade. Students under-achieved compared with their performance in the Year 9 tests. GCSE results, although still to be validated, appeared to have improved significantly in 2003, when nearly all students achieved a grade. Grades A to C were achieved by 28 per cent of students in 2003 compared with 18 per cent in 2002, when nationally about

half of all students reached this standard. Overall, boys at the school attain better than girls. Students from a minority ethnic background perform equally well as the majority.

71. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but are not of consistently good quality. They were good overall in Year 10 but poor teaching was observed in one Year 11 lesson. The generally harmonious relationships between teachers and students ensure successful learning in well-planned lessons. Skilful questioning techniques supported by appropriate praise help students develop a good understanding; this was evident in lessons when students were studying number sequences. A teacher's enthusiasm and carefully chosen examples of equations stimulated Year 9 students: very good achievement resulted. For Year 11 students, the teaching of data-handling topics is too basic and insufficiently challenging. This lack of challenge has an adverse effect on GCSE standards.
72. Standards of work in students' books for the current and last year, indicate a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. This is evident from the slight quantity of work; homework not being used to support learning and marking inadequate to help students to be aware of their mistakes. Topics studied lack coherence, so that they do not fully underpin understanding. They are often introduced in an abstract context, neither interesting to students nor supportive of other aspects of their education. ICT is not used sufficiently to further mathematical understanding.
73. Students with special educational needs benefit from being in small classes where, in addition, the teaching assistants' support contributes to their achievement by providing appropriate individual guidance. In contrast, some support assistants' work in other classes is not sufficiently planned for them to be effective in promoting understanding and raising standards. When teachers mark work, they provide inadequate comments to inform students how they are progressing and how to improve.
74. The recently appointed head of department has identified appropriate priorities for development and is taking action to raise standards, but strategic planning in the mathematics department has not improved since the last inspection. In Years 7, 8 and 9 the scheme of work lacks detail and text books and resources are not up to date. The school has been unable to recruit and retain suitable mathematics teachers in recent years. This has contributed to discontinuity in students' learning and has been a barrier to the raising of standards.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

75. Standards of mathematics in the curriculum as a whole are weak. Despite the fact that the development of numeracy is not generally systematically planned in other subjects, data in geography fieldwork is used accurately and students following the GCSE leisure and tourism course have analysed tables of data well to compare the number of supporters of football clubs with the size of the local population. However, in technology, students in Year 7 experience clear difficulties when weighing ingredients and numeracy skills are unsatisfactory in science. There are few calculations or estimates. The graphs used in coursework are of a low standard and their interpretation is simplistic.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership has recently been strengthened.
- Students' achievement and attainment in recent years have been far too low.
- Current achievement shows improvement but is still unsatisfactory.
- Essential elements of curriculum, assessment and advice to students are lacking.

## Commentary

76. The standards reached by students are far too low. The results of National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2002 were well below the national average, and below the levels attained in 2001. The unvalidated results for 2003 remain too low. In Year 11, GCSE results in 2002 were well below national averages, and remain so in the results for 2003. The extent of improvement in the levels of students' knowledge and understanding year by year are below the progress made by students in similar schools and is unsatisfactory. For example, the improvement during Years 7, 8 and 9 between 1998 and 2002 is very low compared to schools with a similar intake. The progress of students during Years 10 and 11 up to 2002 is also below the progress nationally by students with comparable previous attainment.
77. Attainment and achievement in students' current work shows improvement though not for all students. Too many students have low attainment because they routinely leave considerable amounts of work unfinished. The work they offer is scrappy and careless. Homework is too often ignored. The improvement is most marked in Year 10. Here work is completed carefully and students make satisfactory achievement from the levels they reached by the end of Year 9. As yet, such satisfactory improvement is not secure for students in Years 8 and 9. The work of the new intake in Year 7 includes patches of good progress.
78. Teaching and learning are both satisfactory overall but vary in quality from very good to poor. Teachers do not act firmly enough to resolve the lack of effort made by a significant proportion of students. Also teachers generally offer too little work suited to the needs of high-attaining students. Linked to this factor is that few students have developed a capacity for independent work and self-reliance. One strength is that support staff are very effective and are used well. Another is that teachers provide sound introductions to lessons and the work they set mostly matches students' needs. They do not always give a clear rounding off to the lessons. Most teachers are patient and firm when trying to get students into the right frame of mind for learning but most do not use targets consistently to direct students' efforts to improve.
79. Science provision relies on schemes of work which lack essential detail. For example, there is not enough detail about how to meet the needs of low and high-attaining students. Accurate assessment systems are not well established. Both these factors matter greatly because the current staff include many new to the school, some new to the profession, and some with duties in other subjects as well as science. It means in effect that the work undertaken by students is in danger of being directionless. Provision for science is less effective now in Years 7, 8 and 9 than that reported in the previous inspection. However, accommodation has been refurbished to a high standard. Resources are good, although there are not enough computers. Provision of ICT as part of science is poor. The new leadership has made detailed and wise plans for improvement on all fronts. These have already created significant improvement. There is ample support from the senior team for the process of improvement. Overall, there is a strong basis from which to resolve the many unsatisfactory aspects of science provision.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The computer network is good and has been improved.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding are good.
- The achievement of students is not good enough.
- Students do not acquire the basic ICT skills in Years 7 to 9.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.

## Commentary

80. When students enter the school their standards are improving and are now broadly average. Standards in Years 7 are average. Due to lower entry standards and unsatisfactory teaching in the past, standards at the end of Years 8 and 9 are below average. Standards in the lessons seen varied widely but were below average overall, largely because students' basic ICT skills are insufficiently developed. Girls perform better than boys. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress with extra help from teachers. Students with English as a second language make appropriate progress when supported by learning assistants. Assessment is inaccurate and over-estimates attainment.
81. In Years 10 and 11, one third of students choose to study the subject. In 2002, the examination results for GNVQ at intermediate level were in line with the national average but the unvalidated results for 2003 appear to be very much lower. In January, all students were transferred to the Applied GCSE at intermediate level. In Year 11, lower-attaining students have very recently been transferred to the GCSE short course – their third course. Because of the many changes in courses and teachers, a significant number of students are disaffected and the standards in the lessons seen were below average overall. The new courses have not been examined. Achievement is unsatisfactory.
82. Students have limited opportunity to apply ICT in other subjects. Applications are uncoordinated and unsatisfactory in art, English, mathematics, music, religious education and science. Applications are satisfactory or better in design and technology and physical education. Applications are not assessed separately. Not all students receive their ICT entitlement.
83. The quality of teaching and learning varies widely but is satisfactory overall. All teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and introduce topics well in lessons. The help given to individual students in practical activities is always good. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate work well and involve students by asking them questions. As a result, students are well motivated. In unsatisfactory lessons, students are disaffected and because of their bad behaviour do not make the progress they should.
84. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory but are becoming more effective. The recently appointed head of faculty and other teachers need to continue to improve the teaching scheme to provide better progression in Years 7 to 9 and appropriate courses in Years 10 and 11. The school has had problems in recruiting and retaining specialist teachers. The faculty does not have a full-time specialist teacher. Progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory because, although the computer network has been extended and much improved, students' achievement remains unsatisfactory.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

85. Students have access to up-to-date computing equipment and show average levels of competence but are not required to use it enough when learning in other subjects, other than on business courses.

## HUMANITIES

### History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is rising and achievement is good.
- Teaching is consistently good.

- The use of assessment to raise attainment is excellent.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Insufficient use is made of the local and wider environment to enrich the curriculum.

## Commentary

86. Attainment in history at the end of Year 9 in 2002, based on assessments carried out by teachers, was below the national average. There has been a steady increase over the past three years in the percentage of students whose attainment is at the level expected of pupils of this age but, despite this, the 2003 assessments indicate that standards, although much closer to the national average, remain below it. A full range of evidence seen during the course of the inspection also indicates that attainment remains below the national average.
87. Students enter school with literacy needs and with widely varying experience of the study of history. The work they complete early in Year 7 indicates that standards in history are below national expectations and for many students they are well below what is seen nationally. Students, including those with special needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieve well to reach standards at the end of Year 9 which are below the national average. They make particularly good progress in the development of a range of key historical skills, especially the understanding of the causes and consequences of events and in the ability to plan and produce pieces of extended writing about this. They also make good progress in using historical source material to enhance their understanding.
88. In 2002, the percentage of pupils at the end of Year 11 who attained grades A\*-C in their GCSE examinations was below the national average, although the percentage of grades A\* and A was at the national average. The percentage of pupils who attained a pass grade was just above the national average and very few students failed to obtain a pass. The unvalidated results for 2003 show a significant increase in the percentage of A\*-C grades to A-Level which is just below the national average for 2002, although the number of students who took the examination was too small to make national comparisons completely valid. The percentage who gained grades A\* and A compares favourably with the national picture. A full range of evidence seen during the course of the inspection indicates that attainment is improving and is moving closer to the national average, which represents satisfactory achievement.
89. Students who took their GCSE examination in 2003 started the course with varied prior attainment in history and achievement, including that of students with special needs, is good to reach levels which were overall just below the national average. The percentage of high grades indicates that the achievement of higher-attaining students is also good.
90. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good overall: some very good teaching was seen. Teachers plan lessons to include a good range of activities to engage the interest and concentration of students. They make very good use of questioning and discussion to encourage students to think hard about their ideas and students consequently make good progress from hearing the opinions of others. Teachers provide a good balance of challenge and support. They make particularly good use of a wide range of materials to support the writing skills of students for whom this is a real problem and because of this students across the ability range approach writing tasks with enthusiasm and reasonable confidence, whatever their difficulties. An outstanding strength of the teaching is the quality of the marking, which gives consistently excellent advice to students on what they need to do to improve their work, and pupils show a clear understanding of their own progress and are well motivated to improve. Although teachers set a range of tasks to meet the needs of all pupils across the attainment range, this does not happen consistently.
91. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a strong commitment to raising standards and there are effective structures in place to do this. There are very good schemes of work in place and each unit of study is clearly focused on the development of specific skills. There is an excellent system for the assessment and recording of attainment



which is consistently and rigorously applied and does much to enhance students' motivation. There are good structures in place to identify and support strong potential or possible under-achievement. Insufficient use is made of visits in the local or wider environment in order to enrich the curriculum. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Teaching is consistently good and particular progress has been made in the provision of a wide range of learning opportunities, including the use of collaborative work in small groups. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

#### Example of outstanding practice

##### Effective methods of assessment and marking used by the history department to raise attainment

Assessment and marking are used consistently in this history department to raise attainment. Work is assessed frequently both during, and at the end, of each taught module and the results are used to plot clearly each student's progress through National Curriculum levels. These are split down further to clarify how secure each student is on each level, how close they are to moving on to the next one and what needs to be done in order to achieve this. Marking always informs students very precisely, and in ways which are easily understood, what needs to be done in order to improve. Advice is specific to the subject and focuses on just one or two historical skills and serves to boost students' confidence in the ability to make progress. Students frequently turn to the advice to check that they are doing the right things in order to achieve. Very good use is made of wall displays to offer examples of the kinds of work to be expected at each National Curriculum level and annotated to illustrate what should be done in order to improve them sufficiently to move them on to the next level.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good relationships create a positive learning environment.
- Good teaching consolidates and extends learning.
- Good leadership has facilitated improvement over time.
- Standards overall are lower than they should be because teachers do not insist on their being high enough.
- The use of ICT has not been sufficiently developed.

### Commentary

92. Standards in GCSE examinations are well below average overall. Boys do better than girls but both do less well than girls and boys nationally. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show that the standards of the majority of students are below average. The most recent results, however, show a small rise in standards in both GCSE examinations and work in Year 9.
93. Standards are average overall in lessons. By Year 9, most students acquire satisfactory knowledge and an appropriate depth of understanding, especially about physical processes and human activities. Most students locate places and use maps and other resources competently. Given low levels on entry, this represents satisfactory achievement, especially for students with special educational needs. Although students diligently apply subject vocabulary and skills such as literacy and numeracy to class-work, they do not put the same effort into their homework. This diligence applies to students in Year 11 but again their understanding of the subject and acquisition of skills is not reflected in their written work, especially their GCSE coursework which results in lowering standards. Higher-attaining students, however, consistently produce good quality work and, unlike most other students, use ICT to enhance it.

94. Teaching and learning are good or better, an improvement since the last inspection. Students respond positively to firm, fair and friendly class management which creates a purposeful and pleasant learning environment. Teachers' emphasis on consideration and mutual respect contributes to students' personal development. Teachers' methodology is good, as can be seen in their well-planned lessons where skilled and probing questioning makes students think and where 'bite sized' yet challenging activities consolidate and progressively extend learning. The brisk pace keeps everyone occupied. Modified work is not used enough to support students with specific needs in higher sets. Teachers are insufficiently demanding as regards the completion and correction of errors and overall improvement and are not insistent about the use of ITC for all assessments and GCSE coursework. Standardisation of National Curriculum levels is difficult at the end of Year 9 as teachers use different assessments.
95. Good leadership has led to good improvement since the last inspection, despite acute staffing difficulties. Assessments are designed better and teaching has improved. Resources are inadequate because the access to ICT equipment is not good enough. Books for students in Years 7 – 9 and for the GCSE examination course require updating. Management overall is satisfactory but recent difficulties have slowed subject development, especially in the inclusion of citizenship education and, most especially, in the procedures to record data on students' progress.

## **Religious education**

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

### **Strengths and weaknesses**

- Consistently good teaching in Years 7-9 leading to good achievement.
- Strong teamwork and commitment to raising standards.
- Good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students.
- Unsatisfactory provision in Years 10 and 11 which does not meet statutory requirements.
- Lack of visits and visitors and use of ICT.

### **Commentary**

96. Standards in Year 9 are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. They are improving across the key stage and are better in Year 7. Oral work often indicates an average level of knowledge about religious practices but the low literacy skills of many students restrict their ability to express themselves in writing. Boys contribute to discussion more consistently than girls. Weaknesses in standards relate to students' ability to analyse ideas and beliefs and to give an informed opinion about them.
97. Standards in Year 11 are below expectations. Most students understand a moral and social issue, such as abortion, but are not able to explain clearly a concept such as the sanctity of life nor to evaluate religious views on this issue.
98. Overall achievement for students of all abilities in Years 7 to 9 is good. They build a sound knowledge base about religion. They begin to understand how concepts such as symbolism and belonging can apply to religious practices. This was evident in the Year 7 re-enactment of the Jewish Shabbat meal. As they move through the key stage, students begin to apply religious teachings to issues of everyday life, such as suffering.
99. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory in lessons but unsatisfactory over time. Students receive far less time than is recommended by the Agreed Syllabus so they do not reach the standards of which they are capable. Work in books is often unfinished and the development of their higher-level skills in the subject is restricted. They do not follow an accredited course.

100. Teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They understand their students' learning needs and support learning by providing resources linked to ability. Teachers' management of and relationships with students are good and this creates a good learning environment. Learning activities are varied and motivate the students. There is good teamwork in the department which is improving standards. Teachers are working together to develop ways of assessing students' work in relation to the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. A good start has been made which now needs to be developed with more rigour. At present, there are insufficient opportunities in the programme for students to experience visits or visitors and to explore religion through the use of ICT.
101. Leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear understanding of the way the department needs to move forward and the capacity to achieve this now that there are two specialist teachers. Improvement since the last inspection has been good in relation to the main issues of behaviour, resources and specialist teaching. Curriculum provision in Years 10 and 11 has been improved but is still inadequate.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are close to the national average for many students.
- Teaching is good.
- Students have positive attitudes and enjoy the subject.
- Effective use is made of ICT.
- There has been consistent improvement in the subject since the last inspection.
- Assessment is inconsistent.
- Higher-attaining students are not always sufficiently challenged.

#### **Commentary**

102. In 2002, teacher assessments of Year 9 students were close to the national average overall. In 2003, students' unvalidated results suggests improvement. However, the vast majority of students achieve at, or just below, the national average. The nature of the work set means that few achieve above this level. Students make good progress when they come into the school. They acquire a very good range of practical skills in the different subjects, for example, food, resistant materials and textiles. Their products are of a standard similar to those in most schools. However, their ability to research, produce design specifications and evaluate their work is more limited. The quality of students' work in graphics lessons is good, but they seldom transfer these drawing skills to the other aspects of their work.
103. GCSE results in 2002 were below the national average overall. However, within this, there were considerable variations between the subjects. Girls' attainment was close to the national average, while boys' attainment was below. Unvalidated results for 2003 indicate better overall results, but with girls continuing to perform better than boys. In all subjects, the highest attaining students were given the help and advice needed to enable them to achieve A\* and A grades. Most students work hard and put a lot of effort into their coursework. They take a pride in its presentation and use ICT to achieve this. While in Year 11, some students achieve the Certificate in Food Hygiene. Students attend support sessions during the lunch-hour to improve the standard of their work. They also take note of teachers' comments about how they could improve and consequently achieve well for their capability.
104. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers generally have appropriately high expectations of the students. Their subject knowledge is secure. This enables them to provide very

competent demonstrations and explanations of new skills and techniques. They are very aware of the examination requirements and give students the advice they need to do well. Teachers manage students well. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Consequently, in most lessons there is a calm and purposeful working atmosphere. Teachers rarely provide different work for students of different abilities. However, they vary the level of support they provide and when they are working with students on a one-to-one basis, they provide effective guidance. Teachers plan interesting activities and place an appropriate emphasis on practical work. As a result, students enjoy the subject and perform better in this subject than in most of their others. Relevant homework is an integral part of lessons and contributes positively to students' learning.

105. The quality of marking is uneven. There is some very good practice, with teachers writing helpful suggestions, on an adhesive note so that students can remove it from their work when they have improved it. However, some contain negative comments, or fail to suggest how students could have done better. Assessment at the end of Year 9 is rather generous in terms of the levels above the national average. Consequently, some students believe they are doing better than they are.
106. The leadership and management of the department are good but assessment is inaccurate. The department is well organised and runs smoothly. Good opportunities are provided for students to take part in local and national competitions. High quality specialist accommodation has been provided for food and textiles and has a positive impact on learning. The provision for graphics and resistant materials has yet to be improved and at present promotes a negative image of the subject.
107. The provision of networked computers is a weakness and limits the amount of research students can do during lessons. Similarly, there are too few computers and printers in the department and this limits the effectiveness of teaching on occasions. Many students use their own computers to produce good quality coursework for their GCSE and A-Level examinations.
108. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement. Standards have risen consistently. For most students this is their best subject. The food technology and textiles rooms have benefited from extension and refurbishment. There is now a head of technology, which has resulted in greater consistency of approach in the department.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

Provision for art and design is **satisfactory**.

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

- Teachers plan interesting lessons which engage students' interest.
- Shared, good quality assessment procedures are beginning to improve standards.
- Teachers know their students well and relationships are positive.
- There are insufficient resources and books to support learning.
- There is insufficient rigorous and sustained teaching of drawing skills.
- Sketchbooks are of poor quality.
- There is no specialist technician to support learning.

#### **Commentary**

109. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Procedures for gathering assessment data are sharper, better used by teachers and shared appropriately with students. This is beginning to contribute to students' progress.

110. The standards of work seen in Year 9 were below average. Given that the majority of students enter Year 7 with well below average standards and a wide disparity of prior experience in handling clay, paints and other materials, this shows their achievement to be satisfactory. Students develop capability in a range of two-dimensional media such as graded graphite pencils, oil crayons, chalk pastels and paints. The range and quality of papers and pigments is poor and constrains progress but students have a sound understanding of a satisfactory range of artists and art movements from different times and cultures, such as African art, Aztec design, surrealism and the Pop Art movement. They use these as starting points and make informed comparisons with their own creative work. However, many students rely heavily on reproducing easily copied ready-made imagery rather than inventing and developing their own ideas.
111. A Year 7 lesson in which students enjoyed their first encounters with natural clay showed that students develop good design and craft skills. They also developed good understanding of shape, form and proportion when making clay portraits. Students use chalk pastels well to make drawings of people and they showed satisfactory understanding of proportion and overlapping techniques to create more realistic groupings. The poor quality sketchbooks inhibit students from developing ideas and skills over time to meet National Curriculum requirements. The use of ICT is under-developed.
112. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average. In 2002, all students entered gained a GCSE qualification. Twenty-nine per cent reached the higher A\*-C grades. This shows satisfactory progress over time. Homework is used well to research the lives of artists, to practise drawing skills and to make annotated sketches which students then develop in lessons and incorporate into larger finished pieces. Students are disadvantaged by the lack of computers in the department and art books in the library. Many rely on home computers or work in their lunchtimes. Few opportunities are provided for all students to experience works of art first-hand through visits to galleries and museums.
113. Teachers have good strategies for managing students' behaviour but a significant number of students show signs of immaturity by being unnecessarily noisy and lack a sense of what is appropriate in lessons. Teachers take time to know their students well, plan interesting and appropriately matched lessons to create an encouraging and positive ethos and counteract poor self-esteem.
114. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4. The newly introduced and useful study unit booklets are well received and helping students at all stages to anticipate what they will learn and to understand how they will be assessed. They are a useful way of keeping parents informed. Teachers label classroom displays well with National Curriculum levels and examination grades. In lessons students refer to this graded work, make comparisons with their own and know what they need to do to improve. Teachers have to spend too much time outside lessons preparing materials such as clay because there is no specialist subject technician.
115. The quality of subject leadership is good. The good improvements in planning and assessment are having a positive impact. Relationships are positive. Teachers work well as a team. Subject management is satisfactory. The school recognises the poor state of repair and unattractive aspects of the accommodation. However, opportunities have been missed within the department to use the available space such as the ceramics room and outside the sixth-form studio to promote the work of the department.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are good student/teacher relationships which help foster positive attitudes to the subject.
- The head of department's awareness of the needs of the department and his commitment to the students are good.
- There is insufficient time for students to study music in Years 8 and 9.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to use ICT in music;
- There are too few resources to meet the needs of the curriculum.

## **Commentary**

116. Teacher assessments and work seen during the inspection indicate that standards at the end of Year 9 are below average, but because students' standard on entry to the school is below expectations, this represents satisfactory achievement overall. The GCSE examination results for 2002 are well above the national average but these are from a small group of candidates.
117. All groups have access to the music curriculum. Boys do less well than girls because they sometimes lack motivation and display a poor attitude towards the subject. The recently revised schemes of work for Years 7–9 are broadly in line with National Curriculum requirements though ICT is not provided for.
118. The arrangements for assessment are satisfactory overall but do not ensure that levels of attainment and areas for improvement are identified for students so that they get a good idea of the direction in which their work is taking them. Students in Years 7–9 acquire familiarity with appropriate specialist vocabulary and are developing critical listening skills, albeit at an elementary level. Work in composition and performance is under-developed and knowledge and understanding of notation insecure. GCSE examination students make better progress. There is a greater degree of challenge here which enables students to gain some detailed subject knowledge and apply it in both performance and composition.
119. The standard of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The atmosphere in lessons is generally good and the behaviour of most students is orderly and well-mannered although a minority of boys is inclined to be silly and waste time. This was evident in group work which is not always sufficiently controlled and productive. Lessons are thoughtfully planned, but in some instances would benefit from greater variety and pace of work in order to accelerate progress.
120. In spite of some ongoing problems, the leadership and management of the department is satisfactory. There is a clear sense of commitment and some improvement has been achieved in the area of curriculum planning and assessment, but progress overall since the last inspection is unsatisfactory because of a continuing shortage of teaching time – currently affecting students in both Years 8 and 9 – the lack of ICT in music for 11 to 14-year-olds and an insufficient stock of classroom instruments to support work in performance and composition. Opportunities are provided for out-of-class musical enrichment through various choral and instrumental groups which perform both in and out of school. Some students are able to learn musical instruments but the amount of tuition available is well below average for the size of the school. If the range of instruments and the level of uptake were increased, this would extend the possibilities for ensemble playing.

## **Drama**

121. Drama was sampled in Years 8, 10 and 11. Departmental analysis and examination results were reviewed. This evidence suggests that provision for drama is good overall. There are substantial improvements since the previous year because several aspects have been revitalised following careful review of the provision offered. This is reflected in the unvalidated GCSE results for 2003. A significant proportion of students attained good grades and the pass

rate was among the highest of any subject in the school. Most students achieve well because they devote time, thought and effort to their coursework, as well as enjoying the practical components of the course. Lower-achieving students who fail to complete assignments and do not co-operate fully in practical work hinder the performance of others committed to success through corporate effort. Teaching is good overall although the practical elements essential for drama performance were not seen in the lessons observed because the emphasis was on the drama product rather than the learning process.

122. The well-managed department is battling against the perception of some students that drama is an easy option. Learning is good overall because students are beginning to understand that considerable physical and intellectual effort is needed to succeed to the highest levels. Students are learning to build stable working relationships with each other, working harmoniously to control their emotions because drama is about action not outbursts. Overall, drama studies make a valuable contribution to students' personal development because students learn that each individual is responsible for the success of the whole group.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching consistently encourages independent learning.
- The faculty offers a very good range of accredited courses for students.
- Leadership and management are very good with a clear vision and sense of purpose.
- Facilities are excellent and are being well used outside normal lessons.

### Commentary

123. In 2002, 43 per cent of students entered for the GCSE examination gained the higher A\* to C grades. These figures are below the national average but the results were better than those attained in other subjects. Results for 2003 show a slight improvement over the previous year. On the basis of the assessments undertaken by teachers, standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were average. Standards seen in lessons in the present Year 9 are also average. This is also the case in Year 11. Although overall attainment is below average among GCSE students in Year 11, most of the girls and some of the boys are attaining standards which are above average. A number of individual students also demonstrate above average standards in football, girls' football, athletics, basketball, gymnastics and trampolining.
124. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 is good and standards are improving. The faculty carefully assesses students' attainment on entry and can show evidence that students make good progress by the time they reach the end of Year 9. Achievement continues to be good in Years 10 and 11 where many students extend their independent learning skills. Students with special educational needs make at least good progress and some achieve very well by gaining examination passes.
125. Teaching and learning are very good across the faculty. A key strength lies in the emphasis placed on encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning. This has a positive impact on developing their knowledge and understanding as well as improving their practical skills. An excellent example of this was seen in a Year 11 class where students were preparing activities that they could use when coaching primary school children. Students worked very hard throughout and co-operated with considerable maturity. Other factors that contribute positively to students' learning are the sharing and reinforcement of lesson objectives, the high expectations of work and behaviour and the very good relationships that exist between teachers and students. Good use is made of ICT in learning.

126. Very good improvement since the last inspection centres on innovative developments in the curriculum. All students in Year 10 now have access to the GCSE examination course. The range of other accredited courses such as the Junior Sports Leaders Award, first aid and a variety of coaching courses, is having a clear benefit on the way students view the subject. Consequently, their level of involvement is high. On-going assessment, including peer assessment and the regular use of video analysis, is also having a positive impact on standards and progress. Attendance at extra-curricular activities, particularly gymnastics and trampolining is very high. Links with partner schools, being developed through Sports College status, are now strong.
127. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers are receptive to new ideas and work very well together. There is a clear commitment to raising standards and to staff development. The director of sport and the head of faculty have an excellent working relationship. Together with the outstanding new facilities this is already having a beneficial impact on students' achievement and self-esteem, as well as on the totality of what is provided in school and for the wider community.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

128. This initiative was sampled. The school is taking a lead in a work-related education scheme for Year 10 students. It takes up 20 per cent of curriculum time. Starting in a small way in 1997 with a grant of £3000, the scheme has now expanded. Taster courses are held at the local college and a privately run training centre, with students from other local secondary schools participating. Students have the opportunity to take two taster courses lasting 18 weeks in vocational subjects, which take up one morning a week.
129. The scheme is excellently managed and co-ordinated by an assistant headteacher from Marriotts School. Students are able to progress in Year 11, taking one course in their chosen area, with day release, leading to NVQ level 1. They then have the opportunity to stay on in the sixth form and can progress to NVQ level 2. There have been some notable successes. One former catering student now works as a chef in the USA and another runs his own kitchen in Stevenage. Following the success of the scheme, the Learning and Skills Council has awarded a grant of £500,000 for the school and its partners to run a student apprenticeship scheme.

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

Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is **satisfactory**. The programme embraces a wide range of relevant topics which are introduced at appropriate points in the students' overall development. Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good but the school is not drawing a helpful distinction between what is encompassed by the PSHE programme and what should more properly be studied under citizenship.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and is planned to engage students' interest.
- Students are given good opportunities for discussion and collaboration.
- There are good opportunities for students to experience involvement in community activities.
- There is no structure for the assessment of students' attainment and progress.
- There is insufficient distinction in the minds of teachers and students between citizenship and other subjects.
- Students do not take sufficient pride in their written work.



130. The attainment of students in citizenship at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11 is in line with national expectations and students, including those with special needs, make satisfactory progress. They show understanding of an appropriate range of issues which affect our society. For example, younger students understand the basics of the justice system and how courts of law operate, while students in Year 10 show a developing awareness of the concept of imposing punishments and some of the moral considerations and legal constraints which have a bearing on this. Nearly all students discuss their ideas concerning the topics they study confidently and with obvious interest, although many are hampered by having a very restricted vocabulary. Similarly, they show interest in, and a thoughtful response to, the written materials provided for their consideration, but find some, for example newspaper articles, rather difficult to understand, which inhibits their ability to discuss them fully.
131. At the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 students record their knowledge and understanding in a number of forms. While this written work shows an appropriate level of understanding, its presentation frequently shows that insufficient care has been taken with it. Students file their work in a disorganised fashion and there is little discernable continuity within or between citizenship topics. In general, students show little understanding of the distinction between their work in citizenship and their work in other subjects such as personal and social education (PSE).
132. All students participate in a good range of activities within both the society of the school and the wider society which are designed to enhance their understanding of their role as responsible citizens. These activities are well planned to enable students to take responsibility for others, for example through helping with activities in local primary schools, and also to give them wider experience of social organisations, for example through the business mentoring scheme.
133. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning of citizenship is good. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory and most was good. Teachers plan lessons well to meet the needs of students and use a good range of activities to stimulate interest and involvement. They place appropriate emphasis on the idea of the social responsibility of the individual; for example, in a lesson on resuscitation techniques the teacher introduced a very effective discussion about attitudes towards helping strangers who are in difficulty. Teachers offer good opportunities for students to exchange their ideas with others and to collaborate in groups of various sizes. Although teachers mark students' written work, the marking is rather brief and uninformative. They do not place sufficient emphasis on the need for students to organise their work well and take a pride in its completion.
134. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. An appropriate start has been made to the introduction of citizenship to the curriculum and this provision has now reached the stage where it would be possible to conduct a review of its effectiveness so far. An audit has been carried out to determine where elements of citizenship are already taught as part of other subjects, but insufficient use has been made of the information this produced to embed the study of the subject right across the curriculum. There is an appropriate overview of citizenship topics to be studied in all years and some schemes of work to give guidance to teachers, but there is confusion, as opposed to overlap, between citizenship and PSE amongst the co-ordinator and teachers, which is reflected in the students' similar confusion.
135. There is no system in place for the assessment and progress of students' work and teachers and students themselves do not have a clear idea of how well they are progressing. This is a significant omission. The involvement of the physical education department in the planning and teaching of citizenship in Years 10 and 11 has recently been introduced, and is proving to be very successful. There are clear and well-prepared plans to offer students a wide range of opportunities to take on responsibilities within the community and training for this has already started.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

### Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
General Studies	6	33.3	77	0	23.8	11.7	28.9

### Level 3 GCE A-Level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Studies	5	100	96.4	0	32.8	52	76.5

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers encourage students to strive for higher standards.
- Students appreciate the support they receive and try to meet their teachers' expectations.
- Students' personal development is enriched by their studies of literature.
- Standards are not high enough because students are not achieving as well as they should.
- Students do not have enough opportunities for sustained writing.
- Students' analysis of texts is often descriptive rather than critical or evaluative.
- Students are not confident enough to develop a personal writing style.
- Students do not read widely enough from the range of literature suggested.

#### Commentary

136. English results at A-Level in 2002 were well below average, as they have been over time. Standards are too low, overall. This is partly because the effects of very recent improvements in teaching have not yet had sufficient impact on students' learning and they do not achieve as well as they should. Achievement in writing is low because students are not given enough opportunities to practise sustained writing to fit them for the challenges they will meet in their examinations. Overall, teaching is satisfactory with some good and very good lessons seen. However, too much time is spent on tasks that are not sufficiently demanding and this limits students' opportunities to develop the skills of independent critical writing. Teachers are confident and share their subject knowledge well and, as a result, students respond eagerly in lessons. This enthusiasm is not matched by the quality of students' written essays because they confuse narrative description of the texts with the critical evaluation of the outcome that is required for examination answers.

137. Teachers mark all work helpfully indicating the standards reached and ways to improve. Learning is satisfactory overall. Students appreciate the support and encouragement of their teachers and in response they work hard, but not always effectively, because AS level students lack confidence in their own ability and are reluctant to learn independently. They explain their views and opinions in lessons but do not transfer this skill to expressing their personal response in their writing. Students' essays are immature and hindered by cumbersome phrasing which limits the fluency of their writing. They are not getting enough practice at writing critical evaluations of their texts to avoid vague generalisations. A-level students know their texts well and describe the devices used by authors to convey their views of the characters and societies which they create. But students fail to give their personal response by evaluating the texts objectively to explain the impact of the author's words on readers or audiences.
138. The department is managed well and sixth form courses have improved significantly since the last inspection. To improve further, students should be given more opportunities to respond to plays, poems and novels by concentrating on short, concise pieces of writing, selecting their words carefully to prepare themselves for more sustained writing. Students should be encouraged to read widely outside the set texts, sharing their discussions with each other by experimenting with ICT facilities to explore different ways to present their findings.

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

139. Literacy skills are under-developed in the main school and some students enter the sixth form courses lacking confidence. The quality of students' communication varies across subjects but as a result of teachers' challenges to share their ideas students are becoming more positive speakers but writing skills are still too low.

### **MATHEMATICS**

140. A very small number of students have followed an A-Level course at the school in recent years. The two who were successful at AS-level in 2003 have moved to another school, so there are currently no second year mathematics students. The first year of the A-Level teaching is shared with a neighbouring school, where the mechanics is taught. It was not possible to observe teaching of this aspect of the course because of staff absence. In the pure mathematics lesson there were seven students; five from Marriotts School including one who is re-sitting. Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.
141. Overall teaching is satisfactory. During the first half term of the course, students have made adequate notes, which they find helpful to support their understanding. During a co-ordinate geometry lesson students were over reliant on their notes rather than drawing suitable diagrams to help understanding. They have completed a good range of examples for both topics, in line with the expected standards. They work well, both independently and in lessons. They have coped well with gaps in their knowledge of higher level GCSE topics, so that progress has not been hampered. They either have, or are taught, the necessary pure mathematics' skills to enable them to interpret the principles of kinematics. Students know how successful they are with questions through discussion in class as well as by the marking of work, some of which is by teachers. However they do not know how well they are doing in relation to national standards. Students have found mechanics very supportive of their study of A-level physics. They intend to complete the full A-level course.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

142. The planned development of mathematical skills as an integral part of other subjects is unsatisfactory. However, students follow a general studies course, which includes internet searches and the use of spreadsheets and graphs. Students following the two business courses use mathematical skills appropriately. A-Level physics students are supported well by the study of mechanics within mathematics. The school does not provide a timetabled course to enable students to improve GCSE mathematics grades.

## SCIENCE

Biology A-Level and AVCE science is offered in both Years 12 and 13. Biology was a featured subject in the inspection.

### Biology

Provision in biology is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The broadening range of teaching methods is beginning to have a positive impact on learning.
- Students take real pride in their work and present it well.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in Year 13.
- The leadership and management does not provide sufficient guidance to teachers and students.
- Students do not make enough use of computers or text books.

### Commentary

143. The unvalidated 2003 AS-level results were well below those nationally. One student gained an A grade and two thirds were ungraded. Achievement was unsatisfactory, as most students started the course having gained grade C or above at GCSE.
144. Standards seen in the inspection in Year 13 are well below average and students have barely moved on from GCSE in many aspects of their work. They have only a basic understanding of many key concepts such as diffusion and respiration and this hinders their progress in advanced work. All students have difficulty in applying their knowledge to solve a biological problem. Students' achievement is unsatisfactory because their work is largely unmarked and they receive little guidance as to how they can improve. Students' folders are very neat but they have not been given sufficient help in sequencing work or highlighting key concepts which would help their revision. Folders show little evidence of independent study, the use of computers or research.
145. Standards seen in Year 12 are below average. Most students started their A-Level with grade C in GCSE and overall their achievement is satisfactory. However, the few higher-attaining students are not sustaining high standards because they are making too many basic errors and for them achievement is unsatisfactory. Students are making satisfactory progress in understanding concepts such as how the body fights disease although they find it hard to recall the many technical words they need to learn. Graphs and calculations also present difficulties and the loss of marks in tests. Work in students' tidy folders is well sequenced with key concepts clearly highlighted which makes revision easy. Regular tests, which are thoroughly marked with an A-Level grade, give students a good measure of their progress but because the marking does not include targets, students are not always sure what they have to do to improve. Students have produced good PowerPoint presentations on AIDS and HIV but overall they do not have enough opportunities to use computers in their study. The school has recently purchased new text books, but as yet these are not being sufficiently used for

reference or research. Attendance is unsatisfactory in both Years 12 and 13 and this is depressing standards.

146. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The new team of teachers is beginning to have an impact in raising standards. In good lessons teachers plan a wide variety of activities for students, including group presentations, role-play and modelling that are beginning to make students really think about, and therefore understand, biological concepts and processes. This work is starting to accelerate the learning of students who lack confidence and who would prefer a more passive involvement in lessons. But such planning is not always the case and in a minority of lessons teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for independent study and students' learning relies too much on the teacher.
147. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because students are not given sufficient guidance about standards and, as a result, the achievement of Year 13 is unsatisfactory. However, a visiting Advanced Skills Teacher is now having a positive impact on planning in some lessons. Up until quite recently students have not been given clear advice about expected grades or course choice and, as a result, some in Year 13 are now over-stretched in their biology studies. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory: standards have fallen, attendance remains poor and provision is now unsatisfactory.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' knowledge is good and the encouragement given to students is also good.
- The attitudes of students are positive.
- Examination results fluctuate from year to year.
- The school finds it difficult to recruit and retain specialist teachers.

### **Commentary**

148. Over one in five students take the subject. In 2002, students were not examined because courses were still in the process of being reorganized but in 2003 the unvalidated results of the AVCE single award examinations were above the national averages for 2002, with over half the students obtaining A and B grades. Achievement was satisfactory. Due to unsatisfactory teaching last year and a lower overall intake standard, the unvalidated A/S Level examination results at the end of Year 12 look to be very disappointing and are well below the national average for 2002 – a third of the students obtained E grade and the remainder were unclassified. None of the students examined progressed to the current Year 13. The achievement in the lesson seen during the inspection was satisfactory.
149. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and good in the lesson seen. The teacher observed had secure knowledge of the subject and introduced the lesson very well. The help she gave students in practical activities was very good. Two students, who had entered directly from other schools, were helped effectively by the teacher to make progress. Students help each other effectively and their attitudes are positive. Students learn advanced spreadsheet techniques well whilst creating an income and expenditure spreadsheet for a fictitious restaurant. Students' work shows that they are making satisfactory progress but the standard of presentation of their work is low.
150. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently appointed head of faculty and the other specialist teacher work well together and are keen to improve standards. The school has had problems in recruiting and retaining specialist teachers – the main reason for the inconsistency in the examination results. The computer network has recently been extended and improved. There was no course in ICT at the time of the last inspection.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

The school recently changed its provision for business studies in the sixth form to the Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE). Most students take the 3-unit course in Year 12, equivalent to 1 AS-Level. Those continuing, do the 6-unit, 1 A2-Level equivalent, in Year 13. Provision now also includes a new BTEC First Diploma course, designed to cater for students whose GCSE grades were low, replacing the previous GNVQ Intermediate course. BTEC lessons and one Year 12 VCE lesson were observed.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well in VCE Business Studies by Year 13.
- Individual students get good assessment information about how to improve.
- Girls apply themselves well to work and develop good levels of independence.
- Year 12 VCE students are not learning well enough in some units of their coursework.
- Boys' unsatisfactory attitudes and lack of commitment contribute significantly to their under-achievement.
- Standards of literacy, especially of written work and of boys, are too weak to support the demands of the course.

### **Commentary**

151. Unvalidated results for 2003 show an improvement on those of 2002, but were still below average. Achievement was good, with all students doing better, or much better, than predicted. The small number who took the 12-unit, 2 A2 level equivalent qualification also achieved well. Achievement in Year 12 was very mixed, with under-achievement evident amongst boys. Results from those who took GNVQ Intermediate in Year 12 were somewhat below average, although some attained merits.
152. Standards in the current Year 13 reflect the very mixed range of grades from Year 12 and are broadly average overall. The spread lacks very high or very low standards. Students, particularly boys, are hampered in all their work by significantly lower than average competence in written work. The department has therefore developed good alternative ways of assessing their achievement, such as oral presentations and discussion of business plans in simulated formal meetings. Year 13 boys admit that they did not always respond effectively enough to take best advantage of their opportunities in Year 12. These attitudes have greatly undermined their potential achievement. Most Year 13 students, particularly girls, are now achieving as they should be, but many carry the weak outcomes of AS level into their current performance.
153. In Year 12 VCE, attainment is again very mixed. It is very unusual for all students to be starting with no prior knowledge of the subject because the school has no business studies course in Year 10/11. All are starting afresh and have begun their course satisfactorily. The group feels strongly, and justifiably, that they are achieving much less well in some units of their coursework than in others. This was confirmed on inspection. The school is aware of this and is trying to improve their quality of learning through staff training. These students are not robust learners though, and are becoming disillusioned with some aspects of their course. Girls are appropriately independent and committed to work but this is not so for boys. Given their very low start-points, students in this small group are beginning to achieve well.
154. Teaching and learning across the range of courses are satisfactory overall. Some lessons seen were good. Teachers' basic understanding of the subject varies because the teaching

team has been extended to include non-specialists. Some teachers have good subject knowledge and also understand the expectations of the vocational style of learning well. Other teaching is monotonous; the teacher allows too little contribution from students which results in students becoming bored so their attitudes and behaviour degenerate. Students are confident enough to understand and report these issues, but are starting to be very concerned about their unsatisfactory learning. Where teaching is good, students have very useful opportunities to operate independently, knowing that they can rely on effective help when required. Assessment is good, giving students individual information about how to improve. ICT is used appropriately and most lessons take place in ICT rooms.

155. Departmental management is good. VCE courses are regarded with esteem equal to academic ones. Changes to the curriculum have been effective in enabling students to achieve better results. Teaching and learning have been well monitored and consistent, leading to good achievement recently. Current teaching and learning issues are being dealt with, but not yet successfully improved. The lack of a business studies department in the school means that teachers and students are 'nomadic', and equipment is not to hand. This detracts from the quality of students' experience, particularly as this is a vocational course.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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