

INSPECTION REPORT

ERITH SCHOOL

Avenue Road, Erith, Kent DA8 3BN

LEA area: London Borough of Bexley

Unique reference number: 101468

Headteacher: Mr T. Hufford

Lead inspector: Mr G. S. Bignell

Dates of inspection: 26th – 29th January 2004

Inspection number: 259209

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Other secondary school
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1973

School address:	Avenue Road Erith Kent
Postcode:	DA8 3BN

Telephone number:	01322 348231
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. D. Friend

Date of previous inspection:	19 January 1998
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Erith School is a large secondary school for 1973 pupils aged 11 - 18 including 212 students in the sixth form. This makes the main school much larger than average; the sixth form is broadly average in size. The school is designated bilateral as it includes a proportion of pupils who have passed selection tests for entry to grammar school. However, in practice, the number of selected pupils in each year is very small. Overall, the achievements of pupils when they first join the school in Year 7 are well below average.

The school draws most of its pupils from the north of the London borough of Bexley - an area of significant social and economic deprivation. The school is very popular with parents and is oversubscribed. Most pupils come from white heritage backgrounds, while the major ethnic minority groups are Indian, African and Caribbean. Just two pupils are at an early stage of learning English and a further 28 receive support in classes. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average for England. Over 40 per cent of pupils have special educational needs - a proportion which is well above average. 4.3 per cent of pupils have statements – mainly for specific learning difficulties - this is above average. The number of pupils who join the school after the start of Year 7 is increasing with a significant influx into most year groups during 2002-3. In recent years, the school has encountered severe difficulties in recruiting teaching staff.

The school has achieved Investors in People and Sportsmark status; it also received a School Achievement award in 2000 and was listed as one of the most improved schools in England the previous year. The school is actively involved in several partnerships and collaborative programmes, including a sixth form consortium (Partnership 6th) with two other Bexley schools, the Excellence in Cities, London Challenge and Leadership Incentive initiatives and the School Sports Co-ordinator programme with local primary schools. A bid has been submitted for a new teaching block to accommodate the developing vocational curriculum offered to 14 - 19 year olds. A sports hall and facilities on the school site are used extensively by the local community.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1880	Garry Bignell	Lead Inspector	
9502	Rosalind Hall	Lay inspector	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English 11-16
31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16, special educational needs
22370	Peter Harwood	Team inspector	Science 11-16
30695	Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art 11-16 & P16
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History 11-16 & P16
20537	Kevin Ball	Team inspector	Geography 11-16
6364	Geoff Strack	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-16 & P16
19613	Sue Thomas-Pounce	Team inspector	Music 11-16
11754	John Broadbent	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages 11-16, English as an additional language
20192	Terry McDermott	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16
12003	Andrew Marfleet	Team inspector	Religious education, P16 English
23248	Bob Greenwood	Team inspector	Business education 11-16
1830	Stuart Charlton	Team inspector	Citizenship, P16 Mathematics
23402	Birendra Singh	Team inspector	Biology & Physics P16
19991	Peter Devereux	Team inspector	Leisure & Tourism P16
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Sociology P16
2521	Sandra Killman	Team inspector	Psychology P16
2686	Brian Oppenheim	Team inspector	Business P16
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	Drama P16
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Personal, social, health education

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Overall evaluation

Erith is an effective school. Leadership is strong and purposeful. The quality of education provided for pupils is good overall and the school is very well managed. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, though good in Years 10 and 11 where pupils make faster progress. As a result, achievement overall is satisfactory and standards are rising. Pupils are very well cared for and behaviour is good. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards throughout the main school and sixth form are rising, though remain below the national average. Achievement is satisfactory overall and good in Years 10 and 11 where teaching is better.
- Provision for the large number of pupils with special educational needs is good and their achievement is good as a result.
- Leadership, management and governance are strong, though some statutory requirements are not being fully met.
- The inclusive ethos of the school, including the high level of care and welfare, the effective induction of pupils and the fostering of good relationships, is a major strength. The school's high expectations of work and behaviour produce a good response from pupils. Links with parents, the community and other schools, including partnerships and other types of collaboration, are clearly benefiting pupils' learning.
- Whereas teaching is satisfactory overall, the consistency of assessment, the quality of marking and the guidance given to pupils on how to improve need further development.

The school has made significant progress since the previous inspection in 1998. Standards have continued to rise and there were some creditable improvements in performance in 2003. The quality of teaching and learning has got better, with more good and very good teaching now taking place. This is despite some serious problems with staff recruitment over recent years. The decision to deploy more experienced teachers in the upper school has resulted in better achievement in those years and has been a significant factor in the improving results at GCSE where the proportion of pupils achieving five or more higher grades has almost doubled since the last inspection. Weaker teaching in Years 7 to 9 has impeded pupils' progress to some extent. The priorities for development identified by the last inspection have been satisfactorily dealt with in the main, though assessment and meeting statutory requirements still need further work.

Standards achieved

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	E	D	D	C
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.*

From starting points which are well below average on entry to the school, **pupils' achievements are satisfactory** and most do as well as can be expected. Standards achieved by pupils are below national averages at all levels, but continue to improve. Pupils do as well as those in similar schools nationally. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11, due to better teaching in those years. Pupils make steady progress in Years 7 to 9 and the school's targets were met in mathematics and science. In English, good teaching is now leading to better learning and achievement is starting to

improve. Pupils do not make the progress they should in information and communication technology because too little of the curriculum requirement is covered during Years 7 to 9.

In 2003, the school achieved its best ever results at five or more higher grade passes (40 per cent) and has maintained its above average position with regard to five or more passes at any grade. All targets for GCSE in 2003 were exceeded. In lessons throughout the school, inspectors saw evidence of improving standards of work, especially in classes which were well taught. The school gives all pupils a chance to do their best and ensures that all those who show the potential for higher attainment are included in the selective band.

In the sixth form, students' achievements are satisfactory despite lower than average examination results. This is because compared with their attainment in Year 11, students' standards represent clear progress and are rising steadily. Attainment in advanced level mathematics is above average and there is good performance in art and design and physical education.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Attitudes to school are good and this manifests itself in pupils' good behaviour in lessons and around the school site. The school is very successful in promoting positive relationships which enable learning to take place in a calm and orderly environment. Attendance rates are improving and are now satisfactory, with unauthorised absence (truancy) being well below the national median.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and lead to satisfactory achievement overall. The quality of teaching is best in Years 10 and 11 where three quarters of lessons are good or better and one third are very good or excellent. Difficulties in recruiting high calibre teachers has resulted in some unsatisfactory teaching being seen, especially in Years 7 to 9 and in subjects such as science. Teaching in physical education is consistently very good. Assessment of learning, the quality of marking and information given to pupils on how to improve their work are all areas which require development.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is well matched to pupils' needs and provides a broad range of activities. Opportunities for enrichment and to take part in extra-curricular activities are good. Provision for physical education is excellent. Pupils with special educational needs are well served by the support provided for them. Through the work of the Progress Centre, the curriculum support faculty and the learning mentors, the school provides well for those pupils who find school difficult. The school involves pupils in its work through the School Council and takes their views seriously. The level of care and welfare is high and pupils feel supported through the strong pastoral system. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and are invited to regular meetings. Links with other schools, including those in the Excellence Cluster, bring benefits to the school such as funding to support the provision for gifted and talented pupils and the training of learning mentors. Community links are also very strong.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the school are good. The school is very well led by the experienced headteacher who exerts a strong influence over its development and improvement. Subject leadership is also generally good. The school is very well organised and efficiently run. The headteacher is supported by a strong leadership team who maintain a high profile around the school and assume key roles in relation to school improvement initiatives, for example, the Key Stage 3 strategy and working with faculties in need of support. Governors are a great asset to the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are highly committed and share the determination for continuous improvement. In one respect, however, their role is not exercised satisfactorily: fulfilling statutory duties with regard to the curriculum. The full curriculum requirements are not met with respect to information and communication technology in Years 7 to 9, and for

religious education in Years 10 and 11. An act of collective worship is provided regularly, but not daily, for all pupils.

Parents' and pupils' views of the school

Parents are supportive of the school and value what it stands for. They like using the Contact Book as a way of communicating with form tutors. Most are very satisfied with the progress made by their children. The great majority of pupils enjoy school and feel they are achieving well. Concerns were raised about behaviour, although incidents were thought to be dealt with effectively.

Improvements needed

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

- Improve arrangements for assessing pupils' progress and the degree to which these are used consistently throughout the school. Pupils should be given more information about how to improve their work and what they need to do to progress to the next level;

and, in the sixth form:

- Develop students' competencies in the key skills of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology and in the wider key skills;
- Extend the range of courses and related guidance to meet the wide-ranging needs of students with respect to work-related learning and vocational pathways;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that the full national curriculum requirements are met in information and communication technology in Years 7 to 11;
- Provide sufficient time in Years 10 and 11 for the teaching of the requirements of the agreed syllabus for religious education;
- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

The Sixth Form

Overall evaluation

The sixth form is both effective and cost-effective. It has improved well since the previous inspection and attainment is rising. The new partnership arrangements for sharing provision with two other Bexley schools have had some teething problems, but are generally working well and have resulted in a broader range of courses on offer. Achievement is satisfactory overall.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are rising, though they remain below the national average.
- Teaching is good overall, resulting in good learning. However, in some courses, teaching is only satisfactory and very occasionally unsatisfactory.
- Students do not have sufficient opportunity to develop competencies in the key skills.
- Accommodation used as the sixth form base is poor, although there are plans to replace it.
- The range of vocational and work-related programmes is rather limited.

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	Good in English literature. Improving standards because of good teaching and very good subject leadership.
Mathematics	Good . Students achieve well due to good teaching.
Science	Satisfactory in biology. Standards are below average. The quality of teaching and learning is sound. Achievement is unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory in physics. Standards are well below average and achievement is poor.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory . Standards are below average, but are improving as a result of good teaching and good resources. Sixth formers as a whole are disadvantaged by a lack of planned use of computers.
Humanities	Good in history . Good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well. Provision in sociology is good and teaching is good. Unsatisfactory in psychology. Standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design . A well-led subject with very good teaching. Good in drama and theatre studies . Good resources and teaching; strong on inclusion.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in leisure and tourism . Good teaching leads to good learning and achievement.
Business	Satisfactory in business education . Good use of resources helps students achieve well.

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

Advice, guidance and support

Advice and guidance about further study and careers are satisfactory. The team of experienced tutors provide good personal care and guidance to students in managing their timetables. Students receive sound support with their applications for higher education and visit university recruitment fairs and conventions.

Leadership and management of the sixth form

Leadership and management are good overall. The recent appointment of a Director of the Partnership 6th has improved links between the consortium schools and a joint board has been established to oversee developments. Planning for a 14-19 teaching block and significant developments to the curriculum are in hand. This should enable required improvements to be made.

Students' views of the sixth form

Students have positive views about what is provided for them and nearly all enjoy being at the school. They are correct in their opinion that teaching is good overall. A majority would like more advice about what opportunities there are after leaving school. Most believe they are treated fairly and with respect.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement at Erith School is satisfactory, with pupils and students in the sixth form doing as well as can be expected given their prior attainment. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve better than others because of the higher standards of teaching. Results at the end of Year 9, higher grades at GCSE in Year 11 and performance at advanced level are below national averages. However, examination and test results are improving and standards are now reaching the national expectation in some subjects. In physical education and art and design, attainment is often above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards achieved by pupils and students are below national averages in Years 9, 11 and 13, but are improving.
- Achievement is satisfactory overall and good in Years 10 and 11, due to better teaching in those years.
- Pupils do as well as those in similar schools nationally when their prior attainment is taken into account.
- The large number of pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of good provision and support.
- Achievement in biology and psychology in the sixth form is unsatisfactory and in physics it is poor. In the main school, lower achievement in information and communication technology and religious education is caused by the teaching arrangements.

Commentary

1. The school's performance in the national tests and examinations is below average overall, but improving. In the Year 9 national tests in 2003, standards improved in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science while remaining below average. The school achieved its targets in mathematics and science where there has been good improvement over recent years. In both subjects, the school is improving at a faster rate than schools nationally. Although English results improved in 2003, the school target was not met – difficulties in recruiting staff have had a detrimental effect.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	30.1 (29.6)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	33.0 (31.2)	35.4 (34.7)
science	31.8 (29.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 358 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. GCSE results in 2003 showed very positive gains. The school achieved its best ever results at five or more higher grade passes (40 per cent) and has maintained its above average position with regard to five or more passes at any grade. All targets for GCSE in 2003 were exceeded. While results are overall below the national average, the comparison with similar schools shows Erith pupils doing as well as their peers. Differences in performance between boys and girls are marginal overall and much less than the national picture. The same is true of the performance of different ethnic minority groups who do as well as – and in some cases, better than – pupils from white backgrounds.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	40 (28)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	30.4 (34.7)	30.4 (34.7)

There were 293 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. When interpreting the school's results, the particular nature of the intake of pupils should be carefully noted. As a bilateral school in a Local Education Authority (LEA) where pupils are selected on the basis of ability when transferring to secondary schools, Erith admits some pupils who are eligible to attend grammar school. However, in practice, the number of such pupils is very small – often less than ten in any year group. Overall, the achievements of pupils when they join the school in Year 7 are well below average. This is shown by Year 6 test results where only about 40 per cent of pupils achieve the expected level in all core subjects and is also confirmed by tests carried out when they arrive at Erith. As pupils move through the school, pupils who demonstrate a potential for higher attainment are included in the selective band which grows from one to five classes by Year 11. This practice enables pupils to make the most of their achievement while at the school.

4. Over 40 per cent of pupils at the school have special educational needs: a proportion which is well above average. Their achievement in the GCSE examinations is very good and in 2003, 28 such pupils achieved 5 or more passes. All pupils on the special educational needs register who remained on the school roll until the end of Year 11 achieved at least one pass in the GCSE examinations. The school has a large team of learning support assistants and teachers working in the Curriculum Support faculty who provide well co-ordinated and high quality support for pupils and this leads to their good achievement throughout the school.

5. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are achieving in line with their peers and, in some subjects, are exceeding the highest standards achieved by monolingual English pupils. Where pupils have been held back in their school subjects by a need to learn English, the expertise is available, but in short measure, to help them succeed.

6. Pupils' achievements, and the school's performance in tests and examinations, are confirmed by lesson observations. In Years 7, 8 and 9 most achieve reasonably well, but weaker teaching in those years results in achievement being good or better in just half the lessons seen. This compares with about two-thirds of lessons in Years 10 and 11 where achievement was at least good. Subjects where achievement is unsatisfactory are information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school and religious education in Years 10 and 11. In both cases, this is mainly due to the way the curriculum is organised to cover the teaching requirements.

7. In physical education, achievement is very good and standards are above average in Years 9 and 11. In art and design, pupils achieve well and reach above average standards by Year 11. Good achievement occurs mainly in Years 10 and 11 in mathematics, music, geography, history, design and technology, personal, social and health education and English. In most subjects, this good achievement is a result of strong teaching. Achievement is at least satisfactory in most other subjects.

Sixth form

8. Standards in the sixth form are well below average, but continue on an improving trend which is better than that found nationally. The A - E pass rate has now risen to just below the LEA average. Again, some of the highest standards are in art and design and in physical education/sports studies. In several other subjects, including drama, leisure and tourism, English literature and ICT, standards are at or approaching the average. Attainment in advanced level mathematics is above average. This represents good progress from students' Year 11 starting points.

9. However, achievement is unsatisfactory in biology and psychology and it is poor in physics. In these subjects, standards are lower than expected because students' progress is not as good. In biology and physics, this is attributable mainly to staffing difficulties and some weaker teaching. In psychology, teaching is satisfactory but there are organisational problems which have resulted in limited teaching time available through the consortium arrangements.

10. Overall, students' achievements are satisfactory despite lower than average examination results. This is because compared with how well students have done in the past, the standards achieved represent clear progress and are rising steadily.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	85.3 (83.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	13.0 (15.4)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	165.3 (155.2)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 60 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. The school is very successful in promoting high standards of behaviour and very positive relationships which aid the development of pupils' self esteem and enable learning to take place in a calm and orderly environment. Attendance continues to improve and is now satisfactory. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's approach to managing behaviour is very effective and standards of behaviour are high.
- The quality of relationships between all who work at the school and the good provision for personal development enable pupils to grow in confidence and self-responsibility as they mature.
- The strategies for promoting attendance are very good and unauthorised attendance figures are low. Attendance levels, although below the national average, are improving.

Commentary

Attendance

11. The majority of pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time ready to work. The school promotes attendance well using rewards and an efficient registration system whereby those pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern are monitored carefully. The figures for unauthorised absence are lower than the national average. Although attendance overall is below the national average, the percentage figures for the Year 11 cohort last year were the second highest in the school showing that the school continues to seek ways of encouraging disaffected pupils to remain

in full time education as long as possible. Despite the size of the site, pupils arrive on time to lessons.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	9.6
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	1.1

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
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
Any other ethnic group

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1609	284	8
1	2	0
23	2	0
5	1	0
112	7	0
8	1	0
40	7	0
58	6	0
1	2	0
21	5	1

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

12. Staff have very high expectations for behaviour and a clear policy is implemented consistently and fairly. The very effective communication across the staff and with the outside community enables high standards of discipline to be maintained. There are a few pupils in some classes whose behaviour is challenging but, where teaching is satisfactory or better, they are managed well. An internal exclusion system operates effectively and pupils with behaviour and emotional problems are identified and supported well, for example, by the learning mentors. This has led to a decrease in the number of exclusions.

13. Pupils are keen to earn praise and rewards and they understand the sanctions for misbehaving. As a result, behaviour throughout the school day is good. It is particularly impressive at the end of lessons when pupils move round the school. The corridors are narrow and there are many bottlenecks, but the well supervised changeover times are safe and orderly. The school has clear strategies to combat bullying and racism; no incidents of this type were seen during the inspection and pupils reported that if it happens, the school deals it with quickly and effectively.

14. The very good provision made for pupils' personal development ensures that they are confident and are developing good levels of self esteem. Relationships at this school are a particular strength and this is evident across the staff team, who act as very good role models, as well as amongst the pupils. Self-reliance is encouraged and those who find this difficult are well supported by strategies such as sessions with the learning mentors.

15. The moral framework within which the school operates is effective and pupils feel fairly treated. The wide range of extra-curricular activities and visits develop pupils' social and cultural awareness. The school and year councils offer opportunities to listen to others' opinions formally and these operate well. Assemblies, religious education and personal, social and health education lessons also support personal development well. Assemblies are thought-provoking and stimulating occasions which often have a moral theme and provide opportunities for quiet reflection.

16. Pupils are very supportive of the school – and expressed their satisfaction through questionnaire returns and in discussions. They are particularly unequivocal that teachers expect them to work hard and do their best. The main concern in the survey was about behaviour, although pupils spoken to were clear that the school's expectations were explicit and that behaviour was well managed. Inspectors found no evidence that behaviour is adversely affecting learning.

Sixth Form

17. Post-16 students have good attitudes to their learning and very high standards of behaviour. They act as ambassadors for the school showing parents around during the hectic Recruitment Fortnight. They take on the role of buddies to Year 7 pupils and assist tutors in this year group as the new arrivals settle in. They take a lead in the Presentation Evening and organise a Service of Remembrance each year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good overall. In particular, the care and welfare of pupils is very good, as are links with parents, other schools and the community. Teaching, learning and the curriculum, including the resources available to the school, are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning throughout the school are satisfactory, though better in the upper school. Assessment is satisfactory, but requires further development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching promotes equality of opportunity for all pupils very well.
- Teachers generally know their subject well.
- Members of the senior leadership team, heads of faculty and heads of year monitor the quality of lessons regularly and rigorously.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, though in Years 7 to 9 it is adversely affected by staffing difficulties.
- Some teaching, particularly in the first three years, lacks challenge and pace is slow.
- Teaching in Years 10 to 13 is generally good, though some is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

18. The school takes the quality of teaching and learning very seriously and there is a comprehensive programme of lesson observation, based on agreed targets, which is carried out by members of the senior leadership team, heads of faculties and heads of year. This initiative provides a whole-school picture, leads to individual subject departments evaluating their practice closely and setting realistic targets for improvement. There is now more good and very good teaching than at the time of the previous inspection: over two-thirds of lessons seen were good or better and one in four was very good or excellent.

19. Teaching in the first three years is satisfactory, but its quality is affected by staffing difficulties in several subjects. For example, when teachers are not secure in their subject knowledge, questioning of pupils is not challenging enough, the pace of the lessons slows and

youngsters quickly lose concentration. Conversely, where teaching methods meet the learning needs of pupils, in some Year 7 groups in English and science, for example, high levels of engagement are the result and pupils are often highly motivated to answer questions. Moreover, when pupils are encouraged to take more responsibility for their own progress, as they were in an excellent Year 7 history lesson on the claimants to the English throne in 1066, they quickly take charge of the proceedings, work maturely in groups and are delighted to learn from and with each other.

20. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good and is characterised by effective classroom management, detailed planning and teachers' impressive command of their subject. In physical education in Year 11, for example, work set is challenging and teachers have high expectations of what their charges can achieve. Furthermore, pupils are engaged in the lessons quickly and respond positively when they are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and that of their classmates. In all subjects, teachers demonstrate a profound care for the welfare, both academic and social, of the pupils in their classes and youngsters of all ability levels are treated as individuals and many receive good support also from the team of effective learning assistants.

21. Teaching is at least satisfactory in subjects overall. Consistently good teaching was seen in physical education, English, mathematics, information and communication technology, personal, social and health education and citizenship.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 223 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (2%)	52 (23%)	96 (43%)	57 (25.6%)	13 (6%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)

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

22. The school's co-ordinator of the gifted and talented strand of Excellence in Cities has recently been appointed. She is working to harmonise the initiatives being introduced across the school to improve teaching and learning with complementary activities which can be funded out of the Excellence in Cities budget. Processes for the identification of the most talented and the most academically able pupils, including those who are thought to be underachieving, have helped to focus the minds of teachers on a number of areas of the curriculum where challenge can be increased. These measures are aimed at raising the proportions of pupils progressing beyond Level 5 by the end of Year 9. The school is already able to contribute to and draw on a range of innovative provision across three local secondary schools and thirteen primaries.

23. Assessment in the school has improved significantly since the last inspection in two main areas: the use of extensive assessment data to provide ability profiles and the introduction of a common format for routine marking. Extensive amounts of data are provided by the senior leadership team and the mathematics faculty for all teachers and are being used by all faculties to inform planning and grouping at a general level, but not so much at an individual pupil level. The school uses the data to set individual targets for pupils as well as overall targets for faculties. These targets are usually numerical targets and they would benefit from being changed into curricular targets which tell the pupils what to do to improve. The school is now at a springboard stage where it collects and uses a lot of data. This information could be better used to identify gaps in learning and to guide pupils on what they need to do to achieve the next level or grade.

24. The marking in exercise books is based on grades A-E for achievement and 1-5 for effort. However, these grades do not always relate to National Curriculum levels, GCSE, A-level or GNVQ grades. There is an inconsistent application of these grades both within and across faculties. The result is that, while these grades may inform pupils how they are doing well relative to a particular class, they do not always correspond to the levels or grades that are used nationally at ages 14, 16 or 19.

25. A coherent marking policy has been adopted by all faculties to provide uniformity across the school. It informs pupils, parents and senior management that books have been checked, but it does not inform any of these groups how well pupils are succeeding according to the national standards, or how the pupils can improve and so attain at a higher level. Books are marked regularly, but much is in the form of ticks, with occasional positive comments. The comments are often limited to the amount of effort made or effort needed, but not on how their work must be different in order to move to the next level and there are instances of the quality of marking being related to the experience of teachers.

26. Marking which indicates the next steps in learning, however, is practised by some faculties notably English, business studies, design technology and one teacher in history, and these procedures could be developed across the whole school. In these faculties, academic target setting is used alongside detailed diagnostic marking. This means that pupils know exactly what they need to do to move forward, because it provides them with constructive comments as well as judgements and grades, related directly to National Curriculum levels, GCSE, GNVQ and A-level grades.

27. Marking in GNVQ portfolios is generally good, because by its very nature it offers clear information on outcomes, and shows improvement in performance. Feedback is written and oral and opportunities for redrafting and other strategies for improvement are pointed out and encouraged. Pupils are generally not involved in their own assessment: there are only isolated examples of this. Areas of good assessment practice could usefully be shared across all faculties.

Sixth form

28. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Students approach advanced study in the sixth form with enthusiasm and benefit from the secure subject knowledge of their teachers, who have an impressive command of their specialisms. In history, for example, students are fascinated by the fund of anecdotes, always relevant and often amusing, by which their teachers attempt to motivate students to greater depth of thought.

29. Teaching is good overall in both years, and there are examples of very good practice in business education, history, art, English, mathematics, sociology and AVCE leisure and recreation. In these lessons, teachers' planning is thorough, questioning is challenging and students' attitudes are positive: they have great respect for their teachers and are grateful for their support.

30. In science, teaching is sometimes less than satisfactory because teachers do not always challenge their students at an appropriate level and they are, therefore, passive and appear unwilling to contribute.

The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum for all pupils is satisfactory. Opportunities for enrichment, including out-of-school activities are good. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of all pupils in Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curricular opportunities are well matched to the needs of pupils and provide a broad range of activities, though vocational opportunities in the sixth form could be extended.
- The curriculum provision for physical education is excellent.
- Provision for some aspects of ICT in Years 7 to 9, religious education in Years 10 and 11 and for physics and psychology in the sixth form are unsatisfactory.
- There is a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language have full access to the curriculum.

- Overall, accommodation is satisfactory although some older buildings are in need of updating and refurbishment.
- Generally, resources are adequate to support the curriculum in most subject areas except for ICT where there is a lack of equipment to ensure that all pupils have access.

Commentary

31. The curricular opportunities for all pupils are satisfactory and the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. A number of initiatives have been introduced to provide a more relevant learning experience for those pupils who find the curriculum does not match their needs. The course includes an element of work-related learning at the local college and also provides extended work placements. The curriculum is monitored regularly and thoroughly leading to appropriate developments that are investigated well before any changes are made.

32. The curriculum for physical education is excellent, offering a wide range of activities during lessons and after school. The school has been awarded Sportsmark status. Pupils follow a good Life Skills course that is interesting and addresses a range of topics, including citizenship, careers and personal, health and social education. The provision of some aspects of ICT in Years 7 to 11 is unsatisfactory, because the school is not fully covering the programmes of study. The arrangements for teaching religious education are unsatisfactory in Year 10 and 11, because the requirements of the agreed syllabus are not being met in full.

33. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. They have full access to the curriculum, and participate in social activities organised by the school. The Curriculum Support Faculty is well led and provides good support to pupils with learning difficulties. Last year, the school initiated an alternative curriculum for a small number of pupils whose basic skills are very poor. While continuing to study all subjects, their learning has a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. This is proving a successful development and is leading to good achievement.

34. The school manages the curriculum reasonably well. In Years 7 to 9, pupils follow a well-planned and organised programme. The school has made good links with other schools to support pupils' learning. The vocational curriculum is limited for pupils in Years 10 and 11. There is the opportunity for some pupils to take part in a vocational GNVQ information and communication technology course providing good continuity and relevance to their future learning or career choice.

35. Enrichment through extra-curricular provision is good. The school does well to ensure that pupils have every opportunity to take part in as many events and activities as possible. Monitoring of the take-up and range of activities engaged in by individuals has not yet been introduced. Pupils are very positive about the quality and range of the curriculum courses and extra-curricular activities on offer.

36. As at the time of the previous inspection, staffing remains a problem for the school, but the level of staffing is now satisfactory. This is because of the hard work done to improve recruitment and retention: for example, school leaders have invited applications directly from local universities and have sought good quality applicants from overseas. The level of non-teaching staff across the school is generally good and they contribute well to pupils' achievements.

37. The induction programme for new staff was a strength at the time of the previous inspection and continues to be so. It gives all staff who are new to teaching or new to the school an opportunity to develop their expertise and understand the particular needs of pupils at this school. One strength of this programme is that the staff who deliver it are experienced teachers within the school and have particular areas of expertise to offer.

38. Accommodation is satisfactory. With the exception of the Post 16 "ROSLA" block, buildings are generally clean, in good repair and decoration. However, in many parts of the school, classrooms are too small for the group sizes using them. This is true of the teaching blocks

constructed in 1953, 1996 and 2000. Most subject classrooms are located close together and this has a positive effect on teaching and learning. Accommodation for business education, drama, ICT, geography, history and physical education are good or better. The outdoor facilities of the school are well used and they provide a stimulating environment alongside the sports hall. As at the time of the previous inspection, the lack of music practice rooms, the absence of sound proofing and the difficulties with moving equipment continue to restrict the range of teaching approaches in music. The plans for a new teaching block include replacement accommodation for music teaching.

39. The provision of resources is satisfactory, but the ratio of computers to pupils of one to seven compares unfavourably with the national average and the Government's target for secondary schools. Three of the school's seven interactive whiteboards were observed being used and they make a very good contribution to pupils' learning. Access to ICT for many subjects including art, geography, history and music, is unsatisfactory. Departments are creative in their management of text books and this ensures that the provision remains satisfactory. Pupils recognise the importance of the library which contains a range of useful resources that are well organised and used. In contrast to the situation at the time of the previous inspection, the library is well managed and now makes a good contribution to pupils' learning.

Sixth form

40. The curriculum opportunities are broad and students can choose from a wide range of academic courses. The school does much to meet individual needs and aspirations. However, the range of courses and related guidance to meet the wide-ranging needs of students with respect to work-related learning and vocational pathways needs to be extended. Timetabled provision for developing key skills in communication, numeracy and information and communication technology is under-developed. The arrangements for teaching psychology are unsatisfactory, resulting in low retention rates.

41. Enrichment opportunities are good and students are very much encouraged to organise activities for themselves supported by their teachers. Students take part in a very broad range of worthwhile activities both at school and in the wider community.

42. Staffing and resources are slightly better than those of the main school, although there have been the same difficulties recruiting staff. Accommodation for business education, ICT, English, drama, and mathematics are good. The post-16 block previously judged to be poor remains unchanged, but there are well-advanced plans to replace it.

Care, guidance and support

A significant strength of the school is the well structured care and support it offers to all its pupils. Despite the school's size, staff are aware of the pastoral needs of individual pupils and strive to ensure they are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school engages and motivates all pupils well through a variety of strategies to support their learning and personal development.
- The arrangements for welfare, health and safety and child protection are very effective.
- The well planned induction arrangements for Year 7 pupils and casual admissions ensure that newcomers settle quickly into school life.

Commentary

43. The monitoring of health and safety has greatly improved since the last inspection and risk assessments are now in place. There are very good arrangements for First Aid: there are an

appropriate number of trained First Aiders and these are supplemented by the deployment of a full-time qualified School Nurse. Child Protection arrangements are clear to all staff who are regularly updated on procedures.

44. The tutor system is very effective in supporting pupils individually and there are regular meetings between tutors and Heads of Year and with the educational social worker so that pupils' pastoral care is assured. Communication across the school and with outside agencies is very effective in supporting this area of its work. A strong feature of the school's work is the way it uses a variety of strategies to counter the barriers to learning faced by many pupils. These are in addition to the effective work of the curriculum support team. For example, the learning mentors work with pupils whose behaviour or emotional needs are such that they find learning more difficult. The Progress Centre has been established to focus on those pupils who have had long-term attendance issues or are at risk of exclusion. Tailored programmes of work-related learning have been introduced for over thirty pupils in Years 10 and 11 to encourage them to remain within the education system. There are systematic and carefully matched mentoring arrangements for older pupils using mentors from local business and senior staff. There is clear evidence of the benefits of this work in that Year 11 pupils as a year group had the second highest attendance at the school and a similar pattern is emerging this year. This reflects the school's determination to counter any disaffection.

45. The induction of Year 7 pupils is planned carefully and strengths include good links with the large number of feeder primary schools and a buddy system between Year 12 and Year 7 pupils. Casual admissions are organised carefully including an in-depth planning meeting with parents and other agencies, where relevant, taking place before the pupil starts at the school.

46. Pupils are supported by the PSHE programme and by *Connexions* as they research opportunities for the future. All Year 11 students have careers interviews and there is an expectation from the school that pupils will be proactive in seeking work experience placements which adds to their experience in this area.

47. The school council and year council system is long standing. Meetings for both take place regularly and the Chair of Governors attends school council meetings. The school council has a budget and has prompted changes such as girls wearing trousers. In this structured way, the school involves pupils in its work and development and enhances their understanding of democratic processes.

Sixth Form

48. As in the rest of the school, arrangements for the pastoral care of students in the sixth form are very effective. Advice and guidance about further study and careers are satisfactory. The sixth form council is a forum for discussion about post-16 issues and members of the sixth form are also represented and take a lead on the whole school council. The two school captains and sixth form officers are encouraged to take on responsibility.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The positive relationships with parents, other schools and the local community support the work of the school and the learning of pupils very well. Links are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are supportive of the school and receive very good information about its work and about their child's progress.
- The involvement with the local community and with networks of other schools enhances pupils' experiences and their learning.
- Good use of national and local initiatives support academic, pastoral and management developments within the school.

Commentary

49. Parents are kept well informed about the academic and personal progress of pupils through the use of the contact book, which also contains the school diary. Good links are established early when parents are shown around the school by sixth formers during the Recruitment Fortnight. They are involved well as their children start at the school and are invited to regular parents' meetings. The academic tutoring days are particularly well attended. The annual report of each pupil's progress, known as the "profile", is detailed and meets requirements. Parents are consulted through questionnaires and action is taken as a result of these. Concerns and complaints are handled effectively. The majority of parents support the school well by ensuring that pupils attend regularly and complete their homework.

50. Erith School Community Sports Centre is now a well-established facility within the local community and is busy each evening and at weekends with both individual and club bookings. The school hosts two community forums and these meetings are attended by the headteacher and deputies ensuring that the senior leadership team have up-to-date knowledge about any local issues and are forewarned about any impact these might have on the school. There are good links with the local community police officer and he, together with other local agencies, supports the teaching within the PSHE programme. Many work experience placements are also based within the locality.

51. The school is involved in a variety of different networks with other schools, which is having a very positive impact on its work. Through its role as part of an Excellence in Cities cluster the school has employed and trained learning mentors, set up a Progress Centre and enhanced the provision available to its gifted and talented students. There are good sporting links with other schools and, through the Leadership Incentive Grant, the school is working with five other secondary schools to provide training opportunities to enhance the role of middle managers.

Sixth form

52. Positive relationships with parents continue to support students' work as they study in the sixth form and parents are involved in discussions about students' progress. The sixth form provision has been widened since the start of this academic year by a consortium arrangement with two other schools, which gives greater choice in academic studies.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management of the school are good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Governance has considerable strengths and is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong leadership by the headteacher which influences the success of the school.
- Clear lines of management responsibilities for all members of the senior leadership team, who demonstrate an equal commitment to raising standards.
- Recent staff turnover problems have been resolved.
- Support for teaching and learning is a high priority for senior staff, and the thorough monitoring programme is contributing towards the raising of standards.
- The governing body and the headteacher share a commitment to school improvement, although some aspects of statutory requirements are not yet met;
- Significant improvements to the building provide a stimulating learning environment.

Commentary

53. Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher influences the success of the school and he has overseen many significant changes. These include

improvements to the original building, which has undergone many changes that the school has fought hard to secure and now provides pupils and teachers with a stimulating learning environment.

54. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and together with the senior leadership team demonstrates strong strategic planning. The commitment to raising standards is based on valuing individuals and encouraging potential. Key staff share the aspirations of the headteacher and the school has built effective teams. The school takes every opportunity to be part of funded initiatives, and many effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to raise standards have been put in place.

55. The governing body shares a determination to improve the school and, together with the headteacher, are building a committed staff even though recruitment has been difficult. The governing body are highly committed, drawing on a wide experience base in terms of governance and educational issues. Whilst many aspects of their governance are very strong, the school fails to meet the full statutory requirements in respect of information and communication technology, religious education and a daily act of collective worship. Governance in respect of statutory requirements is therefore unsatisfactory.

56. Clear lines in management responsibilities ensure that the school's decision making, consultation, planning and review procedures are effective. Performance management has been well established and the policy has been successfully implemented. Support of teaching and learning is a high priority for senior staff and the workforce remodelling issues are being seriously addressed. Staffing turnover has been high in the last year; however recent appointments have ensured specialist skills have been maintained. The school has clear and effective procedures for evaluating performance. There is an agreed understanding of where the strengths are found and a realistic view of areas for development.

57. The school is very well managed and forward-planning is a strength: the proposals for a major development of 14 – 19 provision is a current example. The headteacher ensures all staff and governors are appropriately involved in the decision making process to formulate and evaluate priorities. The high quality school improvement plan is helping the school manage change and supports the drive for improvement. The curriculum support faculty is well led and has a clear focus on raising levels of achievement particularly in literacy. The faculty act as a supportive and cohesive team regularly meeting to review the progress of pupils.

58. In the last financial year, the school operated an agreed budget deficit of £156,000. This deficit was planned and included repayment of loans for building work to improve facilities. Due to many years of prudent management of its resources, the school was able to absorb much of this extra cost by a variety of means, and ended the financial year with a final deficit of expenditure over income of some £31,000.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,488,923	Balance from previous year	14,306
Total expenditure	5,534,350	Balance carried forward to the next	- 31,121
Expenditure per pupil	2,875		

59. The school currently receives an annual sum of money which is in the lowest 10 per cent per pupil of all London schools. The school targets these funds totally on its pupils and students, aiming to put high quality teachers in front of children at all times, in an environment which supports learning, and promotes achievement. The governors of the school are fully involved from start to finish in all spending decisions, and they ensure that the school applies the principles of best value with rigour.

60. The school operates an annual financial planning schedule during which three strategic budget options are presented for discussion and decision. The senior finance team, including governors, evaluate these options to ascertain which gives best support for the school's overall development plans. The school business manager provides very clear and detailed reports under the different budget headings within the overall plan, to inform these decisions.

61. A large overall budget is very well planned, closely monitored, and tightly managed to ensure that the best possible use is made of all resources. The school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

62. Leadership and management are good overall. The recently appointed head of sixth form has taken appropriate steps to ensure that daily routines and procedures are effective and is working closely with the newly appointed director of the partnership sixth form. As a result, links between the partnership schools are developing well and a joint board has been established to oversee progress. The new partnership has improved the range of courses for students. The plans for greater co-operation are based on a clear analysis of strengths and weaknesses including the need to improve the work related curriculum. This is being tackled effectively and plans for a 14-19 teaching block and significant developments to the curriculum are in hand.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good.
- The subject is very strongly led and very well managed.
- Faculty policy documents are clear and well focused on raising pupils' attainment.
- Standards are low in Years 9 and 11.
- Pupils' competence in writing is generally weak.

Commentary

63. Pupils' achievement is good. This is because teaching is good, students' attitudes are very positive and teachers' expectations are very high. The subject has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. The collective strength of the team of teachers, plus very good leadership give grounds to believe that the English Faculty's capacity for further improvement is very high.

64. In 2003, National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds indicated pupils' attainment was well below average. As pupils' levels of literacy are low when they enter the school, this represents satisfactory progress overall. More able pupils make good progress, because provision for the gifted and talented is very good. The performance of girls has been consistently better than that of boys. Between 2001 and 2003 the performance of girls improved, whilst the performance of boys declined. In order to improve the performance of boys, the faculty has introduced a range of strategies such as more step-by-step teaching.

65. In 2003, two out of five pupils attained A*-C grades in GCSE English language and English literature examinations. Although these results were well below the national average, they represent satisfactory progress overall. No pupils gained A* grades in English language. Fewer than one out of ten pupils gained A* grades in English literature. However, in all years, pupils' good achievement has brought standards of work close to national expectations.

66. Teaching and learning are good overall, and frequently very good or excellent – just one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. In very good and excellent lessons, teachers create an atmosphere in which all pupils are valued and can value themselves. Teachers have an expert knowledge of the curriculum, how to teach it and how pupils learn. The Head of Faculty monitors teaching and learning to ensure that this knowledge is used effectively. Experienced teachers mentor their developing colleagues. The assessment of pupils' work helps teachers to plan further lessons. Planning for three-part lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9 is at an advanced stage and is used to provide guided activities suited to pupils' abilities. Homework is used effectively to support learning. However, ICT is not being used effectively for drafting and redrafting work. Gifted and talented pupils make very good progress because teachers provide intellectual challenge and support to help them to obtain better test results at the end of Year 9.

67. The subject is very strongly led and very well managed. Faculty policy documents are clear and well focused on raising pupils' attainment. A comprehensive scheme of work has been produced. The next phase of its development will be the incorporation of word processing, Internet research and desktop publishing tasks to support pupils' learning.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

68. The school has an effective strategy for teaching the basic skills of literacy. The literacy framework is in place in English classes and the school has a comprehensive literacy policy. Teachers recognise their role in making this policy work. Many teachers have received training to help them develop pupils' writing, speaking and listening.

69. There are examples of good practice in many departments. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed in art, drama and physical education. There are planned opportunities for pupils to acquire and use technical language in art, history, mathematics, design and technology, music, physical education, religious education and science. In French, teachers highlight the application of correct grammatical structures.

70. Opportunities are provided for pupils to produce extended written work in history and religious education where writing frames help pupils to construct appropriate responses. However, writing skills are rightly identified as a priority for further development. Inspection evidence confirms that there is a need for greater consistency between teachers in developing pupils' writing. Overall, the level of competence in writing is well below expectations throughout the school.

Modern Foreign Languages - French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In marked contrast with comparable schools, Erith School enters almost the entire Year 11 cohort for the French GCSE, with increasing success since the last inspection.
- Standards in French at the end of Year 9 reflect the low literacy standards of the pupils on their entry to the school.
- There are significant problems in recruiting and retaining capable teachers, but there is good morale and good collaboration across the members of the current team.
- The Head of Faculty, second in charge, supporting Deputy Headteacher and staff in the department have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve.

Commentary

71. In contrast with otherwise similar schools, which on average enter no more than half their annual cohort for GCSE French, Erith School entered nearly 90 per cent of its pupils in Year 11 for the examination in 2003. Some pupils were in addition entered for Punjabi, Spanish or Turkish. Well over 90 per cent of these entries achieved a grade between A* and G, with 25 per cent obtaining a pass between A* and C. Unfortunately the grades were generally less high than those achieved by the same pupils in their other subjects, but the proportion achieving a result between A* and C has been steadily rising over the past eight years. Both boys and girls do less well than the national averages in French, but the discrepancy between boys' and girls' performance is being steadily overcome. Achievement overall is satisfactory.

72. Standards in French at the end of Year 9 reflect the low literacy standards on entry to the school and a general lack of confidence on the part of many pupils in themselves as language learners. Less than about one third of the school population reaches beyond Level 3 in French by the end of Year 9. The predominantly good lessons in Years 10 and 11 go a long way in helping to overcome the difficulties which pupils have experienced in learning a foreign language lower down the school, so that achievement overall is satisfactory.

73. Teaching and learning are generally good, with kinaesthetic and visual approaches being used to supplement a largely auditory approach. In one particularly successful lesson with a Year 10 class, the teacher encouraged the pupils to use mime in order to help them remember the language

needed for booking a room. Where teaching is less than satisfactory, there are insufficient opportunities to practise oral skills involving an escalating level of challenge, such as would be required in a conversation with three or more exchanges. Good teaching incorporates and generates high levels of pupil motivation.

74. There are contexts, however, resulting from staff absence and the difficulty of finding long-term replacements, in which pupils have become demoralised. In good lessons, learners listen carefully, initiate and respond well to questions and present their written work neatly and accurately. The assessment system used in French and other subjects uses A - E for rewarding achievement, when numerical levels might be less confusing, as these are used in the target setting process. A different code is needed for recognising effort. Opportunities for practising literacy skills are frequent, but there are fewer occasions in which ICT and numeracy skills are applied or developed.

75. To counter the low standards, there is a good collaborative mood across the Languages Faculty with colleagues working together well to develop schemes of work and to plan lessons jointly. This is reflected in the high proportion of good and very good lessons seen. Each of the seven members of the faculty present during the inspection is a well-qualified teacher with native or near-native fluency in their knowledge of French. The fact that between them they have family connections with many parts of France, as well as Tunisia and Mauritius, is particularly useful in maintaining a high standard of spoken French in interactions with the pupils and in contributing to a very positive image in the school for the additional richness which accompanies cultural diversity. Together the members of the department, including the foreign language assistant, are creating a very positive image for the diverse forms of culture which are associated with the countries where French is spoken. This is enhanced by the activities of a French Club and by regular visits to France.

76. There are significant problems in recruiting and retaining capable teachers and two of the teachers are newly qualified. Support for them is good. The Head of Faculty, second in charge and supporting Deputy Headteacher together have a clear sense of purpose. Each member of staff has an individual action plan. Monitoring, via the scrutiny of lesson plans, performance data, pupils' work and particularly the examination course work, is tight and has helped to raise standards. The department is ready to move to a more flexible system for lesson planning: the current format requires colleagues to cover each attainment target each lesson - that is to offer some experience of listening and responding, speaking, reading and responding and writing. Overall, despite the difficulties, the faculty is well led and has made good progress since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong leadership has ensured a steady improvement in test and examination results.
- The good teaching is a key factor in the achievement of the pupils.
- Many pupils are unaware of their achievement targets and levels.
- Lesson planning is good and teachers make good use of a range of resources.
- The marking of pupils' work is not sufficiently informative.
- The relationship between pupils and teachers enhances the learning process.

Commentary

77. The pupils enter the school with levels of attainment well below the national average. In 2003, the test results at the end of Year 9 were below the national average and the GCSE results were also below average. An analysis of these test and examination results, over a five year period, indicates a steadily rising trend of improvement. There are no significant differences in the progress

made by all groups of pupils. Standards in mathematics have improved significantly from the time of the last inspection and progress has been very good.

78. From the lessons seen, the achievement of pupils is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory overall. The quality of teaching overall is good. Where achievement is good, it is directly attributable to the good teaching. Lessons are well planned and teachers make effective use of available resources. Pupils respond well to those teachers who make good use of praise and encouragement. The most successful teaching occurs when teachers take account of the differing abilities of pupils in the class. This was particularly evident in a lesson with a group of Year 10 pupils learning about the manipulation of algebraic fractions. Here the teacher started by reinforcing the pupils' prior learning before rapidly extending the work, ensuring that all pupils were actively involved in learning throughout the lesson.

79. The positive relationships which exist between the pupils and the teachers are strengths and they provide a pleasant ambience within lessons. Classrooms are attractive environments and are located in suited accommodation that enhances the learning process.

80. The mathematics faculty has an assessment policy which sets out the practices to be followed by the teachers. Few pupils are aware of their target grade for mathematics and most are unaware of what they need to do to improve. Most of the exercise books are marked according to the faculty's written policy, although there are some examples where a lack of marking has resulted in incorrect calculations remaining unchallenged. Even the well marked work fails to inform the pupil of their progress or what they need to do to improve.

81. The head of faculty provides strong leadership and management. She leads a committed and mutually supportive team of teachers who regularly evaluate their work and seek ways to improve their planning and teaching. Care needs to be taken to ensure that those teachers who deliver occasional mathematics lessons, and are based in other subject areas, participate in such planning exercises.

Mathematics across the curriculum

82. All subject areas have been provided with information about the order in which the mathematics faculty intends to deliver topics. Mathematics teachers have also been assigned to different subject areas to assist them in their planning. Pupils speak confidently and positively about their mathematical experiences in the school. The provision overall is satisfactory.

83. At present, there are few examples of the pupils being asked to use their mathematical skills in the wider context, however they do use graphical representations in science, and in art there is extensive work on enlargements and perspective. In physical education, percentages are used to investigate increased heart rates and a useful comparison is made to their fractional equivalence.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Experienced teachers build up very strong relationships with the pupils leading to some very good behaviour.
- Pupils' achievement is dependent on the quality of teaching in different classes.
- There is a need for assessment procedures that better inform pupils of how they can progress.

Commentary

84. In 2003, test results in Year 9 were well below average nationally and below for similar schools. However, there has been a significant improvement when compared to 2002. GCSE results were also well below average nationally and for similar schools, but again there was significant improvement in 2003. Extensive tracking and target setting data are being used by the faculty to inform teachers of the ability range in different teaching groups and there is some evidence of its use in planning. However, this information is not yet used in a way which informs pupils how they can progress. There is no significant difference in attainment between different ethnic groups, but boys continue to attain better than girls.

85. The standards in work seen are those expected according to age, but the level of difficulty is not always well matched to different ability groups in teachers' planning: this applies especially for lower ability classes. Pupils achieve satisfactorily through the supportive work of teachers and the use of some skilled learning support assistants. Teachers sometimes use starter activities which often involve recall of previous learning, but one starter activity used a graphical interpretation about smoking related deaths and encouraged pupils to offer ideas for the lesson which could then be explored further. This was very successful. Pupils are set challenging work, particularly pupils in the selective band. One challenging Year 9 lesson involved burning magnesium in air and dealt with chemical reactions, conservation of mass and using word and symbol equations.

86. Teaching is satisfactory overall and better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Generally pupils achieve better with the more experienced teachers. In one Year 7 class, the teacher set high expectations through the skilful use of a recap of the previous lesson on microscope work. The teacher used a variety of stimulating activities and managed the pupils' behaviour very effectively. In this atmosphere, pupils showed enthusiasm for their work which promoted a very brisk pace throughout. Pupils responded with very efficient, co-operative working, very safe and competent use of the microscopes and other equipment, producing high quality slides with high quality sketches.

87. Pupils achieve well in most lessons in Years 10 and 11. In a lesson determining electrical resistance in lengths of wire, the lower ability group could set up and manipulate the apparatus competently, obtain reliable results, plot appropriate graphs then identify trends and anomalous results. In another lesson with a lower ability group, the teacher had very good relationships with the pupils and used a variety of activities to keep them on task and interested. The excellent behaviour of the pupils meant that they carried out the activity in a very mature way. However, in occasional lessons with less experienced teachers, pupils did not achieve as well. The behaviour hindered the pace of the lesson and much of the content involved copying information or answering questions from the book. Even in these circumstances, the pupils did complete most of the work and their answers demonstrated understanding at the required level.

88. The head of faculty and the co-ordinator for Years 7, 8 and 9 are both on long term sick leave as well as three other teachers. However, both the experienced and new staff have quickly developed into a co-operative team of very committed teachers who are working very hard to minimise the effect of these significant absences. The acting head of faculty is working well to maintain the team ethos. Laboratory technicians are well managed. Standards since the last inspection have improved - almost in line with national trends - with a significant improvement in the 2003 results. There has been an improvement in the use of assessment data, yet this still needs further development, particularly in informing pupils how they can improve.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teacher knowledge and understanding ensures good learning.

- Good resources and accommodation improve learning opportunities.
- Insufficient time for ICT in Years 7 to 9 results in lower standards throughout the school.
- The use of ICT is not being planned for in most subjects and there is too little subject specific software.

Commentary

89. By the end of Year 9, standards are well below average. This is mainly as a result of pupils receiving less than the time recommended for the teaching of the subject. In 2001, the school changed from GCSE to a GNVQ course for Years 10 and 11 and even though this course is better for the pupils, standards at the end of Year 11 remain below average, though are improving.

90. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory because too little of the National Curriculum is covered in Years 7 to 9. There is coverage of presentations, use of the Internet, a spreadsheet and a database, but not to the depth expected. In 2003, examination results showed similar levels of achievement for girls and boys, but in previous years girls did much better than boys. Pupils with special educational needs show good levels of achievement even though there is very little in-class support. There is too little emphasis on improving numeracy and literacy that would result in an improvement in standards in all years.

91. Teaching and learning are consistently good. This is a result of good planning, good organisation and good teacher knowledge of ICT which enables lessons to be presented in a way that ensures good learning opportunities. The resources, accommodation and very good displays also make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. The use of the Key Stage 3 ICT strategy is at an early stage and is not yet having an impact on teaching and learning. The coursework structure in Years 10 and 11 ensures that there is good on-going assessment and feedback to pupils. For pupils in Years 7 to 9, the use of homework to improve learning is weak and marking does not provide enough information to enable pupils to improve.

92. The management and leadership of the department are good. Planning is good and there are effective schemes for the work in Years 7 to 9. The programme for the monitoring of teaching is contributing to the improvement in learning. Satisfactory progress has been made in resolving issues raised in the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

93. This is just satisfactory overall. There is evidence of an increasing amount of ICT use and it is particularly good in physical education and religious education. However, for English, science, geography, history, art and design and music, the use of ICT to extend pupils' learning is in need of development. ICT is often not being planned for and there is too little subject specific software – this results in ICT being under-used in many subjects. Out of lesson time, pupils have satisfactory access to computers.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**, with good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils behave well and have a positive attitude in lessons.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Work needs to be matched more closely to the ability level of the pupils.

- Assessment data should be used more effectively to plan teaching and learning.

Commentary

94. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is below national expectations with 57 per cent of pupils achieving Level 5 and above based on teacher assessments. This figure is broadly in line with other subjects in the school. At the end of Year 11, 38 per cent of pupils attained an A* - C pass in 2003 compared with 54 per cent nationally. However, the percentage of pupils attaining an A* - G pass matched the national average. Both boys and girls attain equally well.

95. In the lessons observed, only pupils in the grammar stream attain standards in line with the national norm. However, from Year 7 to Year 9 there is clear progression in the development of geographical knowledge and skills by all pupils. Effective use is made of the local area to explain mapwork skills and patterns of employment. By the end of Year 9, the more able pupils can analyse environmental issues and natural hazards and draw plausible conclusions using appropriate geographical vocabulary. In Year 10, pupils demonstrate sound numeracy skills when analysing statistical data on global development. However, in other lessons there were missed opportunities for the development of literacy, numeracy and citizenship skills.

96. Most pupils achieve well in lessons. Effective use is made of learning support assistants to assist pupils with special educational needs who learn well as a result. Both boys and girls show a keen interest and enthusiasm for the subject and work well collaboratively. Work in exercise books is accurate and well presented. Books are marked regularly using the school assessment criteria for effort and achievement. Very little work is given a National Curriculum level or GCSE grade and there are few comments suggesting how the pupils might improve their level of performance.

97. Teaching is satisfactory overall and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and understanding together with good classroom management skills to ensure the pupils remain focused on their work. Where teaching is good, there is an effective balance between direct teaching and independent learning, leading to a greater degree of challenge in the work. In some lessons, the learning activities were not appropriately matched to the ability level of the class. There was one example of unsatisfactory teaching.

98. The department is well led and managed. The group of teachers work well together as a team and have a shared commitment to raising levels of achievement. The suite of rooms and attractive display areas create a positive working environment. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. However, schemes of work need to be completed for all year groups to show a wider range of teaching and learning activities together with opportunities for the development of key skills, including ICT. The department also needs to make greater use of the assessment data available to produce more sharply focused targets for teaching and learning.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**. There are good and very good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE, but are improving markedly.
- Pupils achieve well and are making good progress in acquiring historical skills.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good and teachers have a secure understanding of their subject.
- Pupils behave well and have warm relationships with each other and with their teachers.
- Use of ICT as a learning tool is underdeveloped.
- The subject benefits from good leadership.

Commentary

99. GCSE results in 2003 were below average, but were a marked improvement on the results of the previous four years. Because teachers demand much of their charges and because they provide them with thought-provoking resources and challenging assignments, standards are rising and boys' performance is now approaching that of girls. Similarly, although standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average overall, more able pupils are beginning to use historical terminology accurately and in context. However, low standards of literacy affect the performance of many pupils.

100. From well below average levels of attainment when they arrive in school, pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve satisfactorily in understanding how historians work. More competent youngsters show good levels of factual knowledge, but many others make few contributions in class. In Years 10 and 11, because teachers provide pupils with more detailed information on what they need to do to improve, pupils often surprise themselves at how much they know. They make accurate and convincing comments, for example, on the reasons for improvements in British transport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

101. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall and there are examples of excellent practice. Where teachers have high expectations of their pupils and where they give them more responsibility for their own learning, pace is rapid and pupils take part in spontaneous debate, on the claimants to the English throne in 1066, for example. In lessons where teachers are less secure in their historical knowledge, questioning is not challenging enough and pupils sometimes lack concentration. Teaching for the GCSE examinations is good and pupils benefit from a range of relevant anecdotes and stories from their teachers, all of whom demonstrate a profound understanding of their subject. Questioning is challenging, marking is outstanding and pupils are required to support their opinions with evidence.

102. Leadership is good, provides the department with a clear vision of how history should be taught and supports new teachers with sensitivity and skill. Management is satisfactory and teachers are now considering ways in which to improve the consistency in assessment practice at the end of Year 9. Moreover, they recognise that ICT is underused and that pupils need more access to the relevant school facilities. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and is now well placed for further development and future success.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE classes.
- Pupils achieve well in these classes and GCSE results are above average.
- The requirements of the agreed syllabus are not met for most pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

103. GCSE results, for the 17 pupils who took the short course in 2003, were above average. Only one candidate received less than a grade C. By Year 9, pupils are reaching average standards in religious education and are achieving well. The small number who go on to take the GCSE short course continue to achieve well with many reaching a high standard in their work. These pupils are able to write in some detail about important moral and social issues, showing an understanding of the way these are viewed by Christians and those of other faiths. The majority who do not take this course make less progress: their achievement is unsatisfactory and the standards they reach are

below average. This is mainly because they are allocated insufficient time in Years 10 and 11 to meet the requirements of the syllabus.

104. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE classes learn well; they benefit from good, even very good teaching from the three teachers. Those in the non-examination classes in Years 10 and 11 are also taught well, but do not receive the quantity of teaching they need, so their learning is at best satisfactory. The teachers, each with their own distinctive approach, have a good command of their subject and manage their classes well. Pupils with special needs and those from minority faiths are encouraged to make valuable contributions to lessons. Teachers plan carefully and use resources effectively, whether these are textbooks, worksheets or the interactive whiteboard now available in one of the specialist rooms. In one lesson, the teacher was able to use this new technology to incorporate a video clip as well as to brainstorm ideas and structure notes for the pupils on the topic of marriage. Teachers encourage pupils to take a pride in their work, but there is not yet a rigorous system of assessment in place.

105. The department is well led and managed, within the humanities faculty, with very good support for a new teacher trained overseas. There is a strong team identity and a shared commitment to high standards. The department planning, based on the Bexley Agreed Syllabus, provides a good structure for the lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, but it is a pity that the timetable does not allow more religious education after this. The carousel arrangements in Years 10 and 11 were criticised in the last report; pupils still only receive 22 hours of religious education over these two years, which is insufficient to cover the agreed syllabus. With many schools now offering a GCSE short course to all pupils, those at Erith are missing out. If they choose to do the short course, they miss out on other curriculum areas. However, the school has continued with the imaginative provision of 'stop' days in the sixth form, enabling students to benefit from visiting speakers and activities on topics that hold their attention well. The head of religious education was new in post at the time of the last inspection; improvement has been satisfactory since then – the timetable problems remain in Years 10 and 11, but the quality of teaching has continued to improve.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Subjects in this faculty are resistant materials, food technology, textiles and graphics. Provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is good. The strengths of the good teaching are in subject knowledge, high expectations and effective pupil management.
- Teachers need to do more to extend the use of computers particularly for computer aided design and manufacture.
- Although there have been improvements in the use of assessment, changes need to take place to improve standards. This will include a more rigorous approach to teacher assessments and a better analysis of the outcomes.
- Provision for a vocational pathway through the 14 – 19 curriculum should be considered.

Commentary

106. According to teacher assessments for Year 9, pupils' overall standards were below average in 2003. In the same year's GCSE examinations, results were also below the national average. There was a decline in the results for food technology in 2003. This was due to the lack of specialist staffing during the previous year and has since been resolved.

107. In work and lessons seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average. Pupils make good progress. In lessons, teachers provide planned opportunities for them to reach the higher National Curriculum levels. Pupils produce articles of good quality; they express their ideas well and communicate their designs clearly.

108. Pupils' standards by the end of Year 11 are average. They make good progress and their achievement is good. Pupils are capable of high quality work, as can be seen, for example, in the detailed and well presented project folders for textiles and the good quality practical project work. Where pupils use computers, their quality of course work is improved. In lessons, pupils make good use of computers particularly computer aided design and manufacture, but this is an area that needs further improvement. Pupils are challenged to focus clearly on the requirements of the GCSE examination. As a result, they understand what they need to do and are helped to reach higher grades.

109. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge engages pupils. All staff work hard to develop productive relationships with classes and these are good. The teachers ensure that key learning points are systematically reinforced and the good range of activities ensures that all pupils are actively involved in their learning. New knowledge is introduced as it is needed so that students can immediately use it to develop their understanding. The purpose of the lessons is sharply focused and the objectives are shared sufficiently with the pupils. The department places an emphasis on speaking and listening and writing skills. There is use of numeracy in calculations when measuring, length, weight and time. Teachers work well with pupils with special educational needs.

110. Pupils work is marked regularly and teachers generally provide encouraging and motivating comments. In Year 11, the high quality marking provides a commentary that shows pupils how to improve their work. Teachers are beginning to establish systems for assessment of pupils' attainment, but assessment results are not used effectively in planning and teaching to raise standards. The department is not making sufficient use of subject specific value added information to analyse pupil progress.

111. The heads of department provide good leadership and manage design and technology well. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Although there have been improvements in methods of assessment, there is an awareness of the changes that need to take place to further improve teacher assessments and examination results. This will include a better analysis of the outcomes in Years 10 and 11. There is no provision for a vocational pathway through the 14 – 19 curriculum at present and consideration needs to be given to the courses the department can offer. The department needs to do more to extend the use of computers, particularly for computer aided design and manufacture. The technician makes an effective contribution to the work of the department and supports teachers very well. The size of practical rooms and the level of resources have an adverse effect on the progress that older pupils make.

Sixth form

112. Overall the quality of provision is satisfactory. One session was observed in Year 13. The standards achieved were below those expected as the students do not have a sound grasp of concepts. The teaching was satisfactory: the session was well structured with a range of activities which help students to build up their knowledge and understanding. During the lesson, there was use of questioning and explanation and regular review of student progress. The course is well managed and there is a good level of planning and organisation.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and Design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan interesting lessons, which engage pupils' interest.
- The very good leadership skills of the head of department promote an industrious working environment and harmonious relationships.
- Cultural diversity is well celebrated.
- The specialist subject teachers are good role models.
- ICT in Years 7, 8 and 9 is underdeveloped because there is no access to computers in the department.
- There is no specialist subject technician.
- Pupils with special educational needs receive no extra support with literacy needs.

Commentary

113. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. This is attributable to good quality teaching, revised schemes of work and newly implemented procedures for assessment, which are having a positive impact on learning. The quality of leadership is very good. There are clear ideas for development. Very good management and team building skills ensure harmonious and collaborative relationships. The achievement of pupils is good.

114. Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Given that many pupils enter Year 7 with a wide disparity of prior experiences in handling tools or materials, or learning about the work of great artists, this is good achievement. Pupils effectively use a wide range of media, including graded graphite pencils, paint and printmaking materials. There is little opportunity for pupils to develop practical ICT skills because there are no operational computers in the department. Pupils use the Internet to research the lives of established artists in their own time. Pupils incorporate mathematical understanding well, for example, when working out the laws of linear perspective for landscape compositions. They also use a good level of technical subject vocabulary, when evaluating their own work and making comparisons with artists such as Haring, Lichtenstein, Caulfield and Cézanne. They recognise major European art movements such as Impressionism and Pop Art as well as world cultures, such as Aboriginal and ancient Japanese. There is little opportunity provided for pupils to appreciate the important work which women artists have contributed to world culture. Pupils' attitudes are very positive. They work productively and with obvious enjoyment.

115. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. In 2003, all students entered for GCSE gained A* – G grades, the majority (74.4 per cent) achieved the higher A - C grades. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. Most pupils make intelligent and creative use of sketchbooks for homework and class projects. They research and critically analyse the lives and ideas of established artists, practise drawing skills and make annotated sketches and diagrams, which they develop in lessons and incorporate into larger, finished paintings. Pupils experiment with intentional and accidental effects, when exploring new mark-making materials, in order to express ideas clearly and find their own 'visual voice'. In lessons, pupils with special needs receive no extra support for literacy to meet the increasing demands for written work in the national curriculum and GCSE coursework.

116. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are good role models, personally and academically. They have good practical expertise and use demonstration as a powerful teaching tool. Pupils recognise this capability, show respect and appreciation and try to emulate it. Teachers work well together as a committed team. They share ideas, develop teaching programmes and

promote a positive ethos to support pupils' learning. The large numbers of pupils accommodated in GCSE lessons places constraints on coursework choices such as sculpture because of the cramped working conditions. Teachers closely monitor pupils' progress. They give good verbal and written feedback, so that pupils know how to improve. Teachers have to spend too much time outside lessons preparing materials because there is no technical support.

117. Under the very good leadership of the head of department, the specialist visual art teachers, all of whom are new to the school, have quickly become an effective team. They co-operate well and generously share practical expertise. This helps to promote an industrious working environment and harmonious relationships, which students recognise, respect and enjoy.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are providing good help to individual pupils enabling them to catch up on missed coursework.
- Teachers are not always presenting enough pace and challenge in lessons.
- Accommodation and resources are inadequate to meet the learning needs of the pupils.
- Information and communication technology is not used to support teaching and learning.
- Staffing changes have caused instability within the department.

Commentary

118. The music department has suffered significant staffing difficulties during the past year and this has had an adverse effect on standards that pupils achieve. The school has appointed new staff and the acting head of department has only been in post since January 2004. Standards on entry are below average and standards of work seen in Years 7 – 9 are also below average. However, pupils are now making satisfactory progress in both key stages. Achievement in Year 11 is good and in 2002 the proportion of pupils gaining A*– C at GCSE was above average. Standards in Year 11 vary considerably.

119. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The recently qualified teaching staff are keen to do their best. In most lessons they are managing pupil behaviour well enough for learning to take place. All lessons have clear learning objectives, however there are instances where classroom routines are not yet sufficiently established, and pace and challenge are lacking. Higher attaining pupils use the opportunities presented to apply themselves to produce good quality work. Teachers are providing good individual support to pupils in most lessons. Pupils in Year 11 are making good use of a developing musical vocabulary.

120. Overall pupils attitudes are satisfactory, however not all pupils respond enthusiastically, especially where the management of pupils is insecure and work not always modified for individual needs. Monitoring of achievement is at a very early stage and therefore use of this to review teaching and learning is not satisfactory. The quality of teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory and in a shabby condition. However, there are plans to improve this in the proposed 14 – 19 teaching block. Resources for learning in the subject are unsatisfactory, and there is little space for practical music making. At present, there are no resources and no opportunities for pupils to make use of technology in music.

121. Leadership of the subject benefits from being part of the Creative Arts Faculty. Some aspects of management have suffered from the significant period of disruption. The newly appointed acting head of department has been in post for three weeks, and has only recently completed her induction as a newly qualified teacher. She and the other new teacher are working hard to re-establish the department. Documentation has had to be rewritten, including the schemes of work,

and an assessment scheme established. Much work is in progress and this needs to be set within an overall departmental and faculty plan. Since the last inspection, issues of curriculum time have been addressed and improvement has been satisfactory. Good liaison within the Faculty is enabling a performance of the musical *Grease* later this year. Music has been through a difficult period and standards have fallen as a consequence of recruitment difficulties. However, there is a good awareness in the school of areas of relative weakness that need to be addressed.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently very good teaching which promotes very good learning.
- Excellent leadership and management.
- Very good achievement by pupils of all ages.
- Very good attitude and behaviour of pupils.

Commentary

122. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were average when judged against national standards. Pupils taking the examination did better in this subject than they did in the other examinations they sat. Standards of work seen in the inspection were very good. The achievement of all groups of pupils is very good. Pupils enter the school with below average levels of attainment. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. This represents very good achievement. In Year 11, standards for all pupils are well above the normal expectation. For these pupils, evidence shows that this represents very good achievement over the five years spent in the school.

123. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. All teachers have secure knowledge and are very enthusiastic in their delivery. They manage their classes very well, and this ensures that all pupils have the opportunity to learn quickly. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to work without direct supervision, and the pupils respond well to this trust. They work seriously and achieve very well. Pupils are always clear about what the teacher is trying to get across and this leads directly to very good learning. Teachers expect pupils to work hard, and they do. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They pay close attention to teacher guidance, and work with energy and enthusiasm. Relationships are very good, and this contributes strongly to very good overall progress in lessons.

124. The best lessons are exciting, interesting and enjoyable experiences. In a Year 9 badminton lesson, a group of girls quickly grasped how to execute the overhead clear, and how to use that stroke to manoeuvre opponents around the court. In a Year 11 football lesson, a committed group of boys responded well to good humoured promptings from the teacher and played a very skilful and high paced game which highlighted their ability to pass and move effectively. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in physical activities outside the normal school day.

125. Leadership is excellent. The faculty has a clear and shared vision of the standards it wishes to achieve, and knows how it intends to reach these standards. Relationships within the staff group are excellent, and they make a well-balanced team. There is a clear imperative to improve on previous best. Management of the faculty is excellent. Detailed lesson plans are used to support very well laid out and comprehensive schemes of work, which ensures that the needs of all pupils are met. Teachers have total commitment to the students and the subject. Assessment of what pupils know is clear and robust, and provides accurate information on pupil performance. Very careful staff deployment ensures equality of opportunity across all areas of the curriculum. Resources to support learning are excellent. Improvement since the last inspection is good. High standards have been raised further. The faculty holds the Sportsmark Award and is preparing to apply for the Gold award. This faculty does the right things correctly, and is a model of professional practice.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan lessons effectively.
- There is a wide range of resources at the disposal of the department, although a lack of links with outside businesses to broaden and enrich the curriculum.
- Classroom tasks are insufficiently tailored to the learning needs of pupils.

Commentary

126. Results at GCSE are below the national average, but show an improvement from 2002 to 2003. When comparing what pupils with similar abilities might be expected to attain, their performance was above average in 2003. Looking at results over a wider span of years, there is no upward trend of improvement. The achievement of pupils is satisfactory, no matter what their gender or ethnicity, because many start their courses with below average attainment. Within and between the classes seen, pupils' have a wide range of ability, motivation and ambition. This variability is a major challenge facing the department in terms of the courses provided and the tasks and assignments set for pupils.

127. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Despite difficulties in recruiting staff, the teachers in the department have secure subject knowledge. Lesson planning and individual advice and support given to pupils is effective. ICT and other classroom resources created by staff are used very effectively to capture pupils' attention. All pupils make progress. Teachers log pupils' prior attainment and examination grade targets in their planners and monitor pupils' progress against these in lessons and tests. However, pupils have an uneven knowledge of their targets or how they need to improve to reach them. Hence they are not fully equipped to take responsibility and to learn independently.

128. Teachers use relevant and up-to-date examples from newspapers to extend pupils' understanding, but techniques such as summing-up sessions to clarify understanding are insufficiently developed. There are no links with local businesses or the community that could act as a rich resource for course work topics and inspire pupils to achieve more. Tasks set in lessons are insufficiently tailored to the very wide spectrum of learning needs pupils have. Library book resources for business are very meagre.

129. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear wish to see teaching, learning and achievement improve. There is a focus on monitoring achievement and standards across the department. With the increasing emphasis upon a diversified 14-19 curriculum very closely tailored to the learning needs and aspirations of pupils, this is a major challenge for the department. The day-to-day management and organisation of pupils and staff is effective. Business education as a subject was not reported upon at the last inspection therefore it is not possible to quantify improvement since then.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education (PSHE)

Provision in PSHE is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good curriculum planning ensures that a very wide range of relevant topics are taught.
- The quality of teaching is good and is a key factor in the enthusiasm pupils bring to their work.
- Lessons are invariably stimulating and are made relevant to pupils' lives and interests.

Commentary

130. All pupils in the school follow a PSHE programme. The programme is very well organised and the wide range of topics that are covered are relevant to the pupils' lives and interests. Within the PSHE programme the school is meeting its statutory obligation to deliver a programme of drugs education and sex and relationships education. The programme enables pupils to develop clear and responsible approaches to these matters.

131. The overall quality of the teaching is good and results in good achievement. Lessons are well prepared and well delivered. Generally pupils respond enthusiastically. Many instances of active participation were observed. A good example of how a productive discussion followed by active participation can enhance learning was observed in a Year 9 lesson when pupils discussed how they would react to finding someone unconscious. Much time, energy and professional skill has been used to create a large bank of information, literature and work sheets which are helping teachers to successfully deliver PSHE lessons. Teachers are supported by a large number of outside speakers.

132. The PSHE course is very well organised by the subject co-ordinator. She has been responsible for the creation of the excellent range of resources and teaching aids that support good teaching of the subject. She, and members of the senior staff, monitor the quality of teaching and learning to ensure consistency.

133. The school's programme for careers education and guidance is well managed and is very effective in helping pupils prepare themselves for the next stage of learning and the world of work. At the beginning of Year 11, all pupils undertake two weeks work experience, when they spend the time experiencing working conditions with local employers.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The enthusiastic co-ordinator, assisted well by the head of life skills faculty, has developed a good policy document and scheme of work. However, the assessment systems for pupils in Years 7 to 9 have only recently been put in place.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is good with several very good features and this enables pupils in Years 7 to 9 to make good progress and achieve well. Achievement for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory.
- The subject is given high priority and will be introduced into the post-16 curriculum in March 2004.
- Monitoring of the programme is at an early stage of development, as the system was only implemented in January 2004 and the mapping of the topics for pupils in Years 10 and 11 has

only recently been completed. It is not sufficiently refined to identify duplication for individual pupils across the other subjects for the curriculum.

Commentary

134. The co-ordinator for citizenship was only appointed in September 2003 and since that time he has re-developed the school's policy and provision for all year groups, including post-16 students. Consequently, the school's programme for developing pupils' experiences and understanding of citizenship is still at the very early stages of its introduction. The main focus of development has been in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, development work has appropriately focused on mapping the citizenship topics across the other subjects of the curriculum and incorporating specific citizenship lessons into the social science programme. Life skills and PSHE make a sound contribution to meeting the requirements of the subject in Years 7 to 11. As this is a new subject, there are no available national comparative measures for standards. In the lessons seen during the inspection and from the scrutiny of work, pupils' achievements in Years 7 to 9 are good, while those for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory.

135. Across Years 7 to 11, the quality of teaching is good with several very good features in Years 7 to 9. Teachers develop good relationships with the pupils and create a positive climate where controversial and sensitive issues can be discussed meaningfully. They plan their lessons well and provide a good and interesting range of work so that most pupils respond well and are motivated by the tasks set for them. This was well demonstrated in a Year 7 lesson, where pupils developed a clear understanding of stereotyping through listening to a range of national anthems and matching them to their countries of origin. The teacher used his knowledge of the pupils' levels of understanding to organise them into groups so that they worked productively together. There are clear systems and methodologies in place for assessment in Years 7 to 9. However, these have only recently been implemented and are untested. Regular assessment of pupils' learning by teachers is effective and they know their pupils well. In Years 10 and 11, assessment is at a very early stage of development and is mainly on a day-to-day basis or through social science.

136. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator is very enthusiastic and the policies and schemes of work he has developed are comprehensive and of very good quality. These have been effective in raising the profile of citizenship with pupils and staff, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and have considerably enhanced the achievement of pupils in these year groups. Although the topics have been appropriately mapped across the subjects of the Year 10 and 11 curriculum, the system to monitor the programme is not sufficiently robust to identify duplication. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of the subject in Years 10 and 11 and in post-16, but this has not yet been shared widely across the staff teaching these pupils and students.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	8	100	N/A	25	N/A	2.88	N/A
Business	21	95	N/A	24	N/A	2.14	N/A
Biology	12	67	N/A	8	N/A	1.42	N/A
Chemistry	13	38	N/A	0	N/A	0.69	N/A
Drama	10	100	N/A	10	N/A	2.40	N/A
Design and Technology	5	100	N/A	20	N/A	2.40	N/A
English	22	86	N/A	27	N/A	2.14	N/A
History	10	80	N/A	30	N/A	2.40	N/A
Information Technology	25	80	N/A	24	N/A	1.92	N/A
Law	17	65	N/A	6	N/A	1.12	N/A
Sociology	18	89	N/A	39	N/A	2.56	N/A
Media Studies	18	83	N/A	28	N/A	2.33	N/A
Physical Education	5	100	N/A	20	N/A	2.00	N/A
Psychology	8	75	N/A	37.5	N/A	2.38	N/A
Physics	8	50	N/A	0	N/A	1.00	N/A

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	7	100	N/A	14	N/A	2.57	N/A
Business	11	100	N/A	9	N/A	2.27	N/A
Biology	6	100	N/A	17	N/A	2.33	N/A
Chemistry	4	50	N/A	0	N/A	1.25	N/A
Drama	4	100	N/A	75	N/A	4.25	N/A
Design Technology	9	89	N/A	11	N/A	2.00	N/A
English	15	100	N/A	7	N/A	2.07	N/A
Geology	4	100	N/A	25	N/A	3.00	N/A
History	7	100	N/A	14	N/A	2.29	N/A
Information Technology	7	100	N/A	14	N/A	2.86	N/A

Law	6	100	N/A	0	N/A	1.67	N/A
Mathematics	9	100	N/A	22	N/A	4.70	N/A
Media Studies	22	100	N/A	23	N/A	3.05	N/A
Physical Education	8	100	N/A	0	N/A	1.88	N/A
Physics	3	100	N/A	0	N/A	2.33	N/A
Sociology	8	100	N/A	25	N/A	2.50	N/A

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business 1	12	91.7	N/A	8	N/A	0	N/A
Information Technology	16	77.8	N/A	43.7	N/A	0	N/A

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English Literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good teaching and learning.
- Standards are improving.
- Students have a positive attitude to their work.
- The faculty is very well led and managed.

Commentary

137. Although most students in recent years have achieved A-level passes, their results have been below the national average. However, there are indications that standards are improving, and current students are reaching standards that are in line with those in other schools, overall. There is a range of achievement, but the best students are able to produce thoughtful pieces of extended writing that would indicate that more could achieve higher grades. The students seen in lessons are not particularly articulate, but can express themselves well when prompted, for example in 'hot seating' the characters in *About a Boy*. In the light of their prior attainment, most students can be said to be achieving satisfactorily; some are achieving well. Relatively few boys do the subject.

138. Students learn well because they receive good teaching; this will eventually impact on standards and results – after a period of staffing instability. There are several very capable A-level teachers who have a very good command of the subject. In all lessons, students are well resourced and enabled to focus in depth on the relevant texts. In the best lessons, they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, as in a lesson on Larkin where students were required to work in several different pairs in order to deconstruct the two poems under consideration. There are positive attitudes and good relationships in the lessons. Written work is assessed thoroughly and helpfully.

139. The head of English has made an impact during her relatively short time in post. Texts have been carefully chosen by the English post-16 co-ordinator in recognition that many of the students, including those from minority groups, do not bring an extensive knowledge of the English literary heritage to their studies. The future for the subject is bright. Although the "impressive" results that were reported at the last inspection were not maintained, the faculty is now back on course and is serving the students well.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

140. Students in the sixth form do not all have sufficient language skills to access their chosen subjects, which leads to underachievement in some areas. In an extreme case, a student for whom English was an additional language had to drop out of courses that were proving too difficult. It is possible for students to retake GCSE English, but Key Skills are not a compulsory part of the curriculum and many students rely on literacy skills being imparted by their various subject teachers.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been a steady improvement in the standards which students attain in A Level examinations and in 2003 the A2 results were above the national average.

- Students' achieve well and for some achievement is very good.
- Overall teaching is good with several very good features and has a positive impact on students' learning.
- Teachers mark work regularly, but written feedback does not clearly identify what students need to do to improve their grades.

Commentary

141. Since the last inspection, the standards which students attain in their A Level examinations have improved considerably and, in 2002 and 2003, all the students who took the examination achieved at least a pass grade. In 2003, the results in the A2 examination were better than the national average, with 11 per cent of students attaining a grade A, another 11 per cent a grade B and 22 per cent a grade C. When they enter the sixth form, the grades which students have attained in their GCSE examinations are lower than would be expected nationally. During their time in the sixth form, all students achieve well and for several their achievements are very good. Although attainment in the AS programme is not as good with respect to national averages, it still represents at least good and sometimes very good achievement. A similar picture was seen during the inspection. Overall achievement was at least good and for some students it was very good. Attainment at AS is sometimes hampered by the relatively low attainment at GCSE of some students.

142. Overall, the quality of teaching is good with several very good features. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they develop good relationships with their students and these have a positive impact on achievement. They recognise the needs of individuals and use a wide range of strategies to engage the students' interest and develop their understanding of the subject. A significant feature in all the lessons seen was the step-by-step approach to developing students' understanding and their problem-solving skills. Teachers recognise the cultural and language needs of their students and match the work to these very well. Several students indicated that they found the mechanics and statistics modules more difficult to comprehend than those in pure mathematics. They felt that teachers made every effort to support them through helping them to read questions carefully. All teachers mark work thoroughly and give students good oral feedback about how to improve their grades. However, the written comments on students' work do not always indicate clearly what should be done to improve and students' notes are not always monitored as carefully as they could be to ensure that these provide an adequate base for revision.

143. The faculty is well managed, and, although the head of faculty does not teach on the present AS or A2 programme, she has brought together a group of teachers who work well as a team. Under her guidance, a good scheme of work has been developed and the organisation of the modules has been changed in the light of students' experiences and their examination results. This careful monitoring of the outcomes of specific modules has been very helpful to the present cohort of students, particularly those in Year 12, who now follow a more flexible programme than in the past. The accommodation and resources are generally good and have a positive impact on students' achievements. However, as the numbers in Year 12 grow, room sizes will constrain the good strategies for self and peer assessment currently in use.

Mathematics across the curriculum

144. As well as the AS and A2 courses, the department also provides a GCSE re-sit programme for students in Year 12 who need such a qualification. Generally, the results students attain on this programme are satisfactory, but do not always fully reflect their needs. For some students a more general qualification, less dependent on examination success would be more appropriate. Such an option is presently under consideration as part of the review of the sixth form curriculum in response to recent changes in statutory requirements.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was on biology and physics. Chemistry was also sampled. In A-level chemistry, examination results in recent years including 2003 have been below average. One Year 13 lesson was observed in which students showed satisfactory understanding of the characteristics of transition metals.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in AS level examinations is well below average and needs to be improved.
- Students need regular and frequent feedback on how to improve.
- Relationships are very good.
- Students' skills of scientific enquiry need to improve further.
- Few opportunities are provided for students to engage in discussion of ideas and concepts.

Commentary

145. Students' attainment in A Level examinations in 2003 was average, with 50 per cent obtaining A - C grades and 100 per cent A - E grades. This represents a significant improvement in attainment over the past three years and is in line with the standards in biology at the time of the last inspection. Students' attainment in AS Level examinations has remained well below national averages in recent years and the results of summer 2003 with 50 per cent D - E and 33 per cent ungraded confirm this position.

146. The standards of work seen in Year 13 are below national averages. The higher attaining students in Year 13 show good understanding of phenomena such as photosynthesis and respiration, but are less sure of the links between them. Most students are well motivated and show interest in the subject. However, they are not fully aware of how well they are doing and their expectations are low. Overall achievement in Year 13 is currently unsatisfactory.

147. The standards of work seen in Year 12 are well below national averages. There is very little independent writing, and students' ability to analyse experimental results is weak. Most students in Year 12 have at least a double C grade in GCSE science and show interest in the subject. However, they are achieving well below their capacity. Higher attaining students have appropriate expectations, but they are not fully aware of how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve further. The middle and lower attaining students have no clear expectations and do not know how to improve.

148. Overall, teaching is satisfactory and its impact on learning is sound. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They know the A Level syllabus well and provide sound support for coursework. Lesson planning is satisfactory. However, learning objectives are not always made clear. Teachers provide good notes, but the teaching style is largely one of information-giving with very little active student participation. Questioning is limited to recalling facts and opportunities to discuss how, why and "what if" questions are very few. This was a weakness at the time of the last inspection and needs to be addressed.

149. There is some evidence of constructive written comments on homework and marked tests which provides guidance for improvement. However, day-to-day assessment is weak and feedback to students on how to improve is infrequent and unsystematic. As a consequence, although they know the grades they have received in the recent tests, most do not have a clear enough idea of how to improve. This inhibits progress in general and that of the middle and lower attaining students in

particular. All students, and those in Year 12 in particular, would benefit greatly from regular feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and on how to improve.

150. Use of ICT in lessons is weak. Some key members of staff including the head of faculty have been on long-term sick leave. This has made it difficult to lead and manage this large faculty. Despite this, the subject is managed well by the acting head of faculty. However, improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.

Physics

Provision in physics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships are very good.
- The recent appointment of a new physics teacher has considerably improved the provision.
- Attainment in A Level and AS Level examinations is well below national averages.
- The quality of day-to-day assessment and feedback to students on how to improve is poor.
- Few opportunities are provided for students to make oral contributions.

Commentary

151. The attainment of students in A-level examinations has been well below national averages in recent years. There was an improvement in the 2003 examinations with students achieving 100 per cent A - E passes. However, with no A - B grades, the results remained well below average. AS Level performance has also been well below national averages. In the 2003 AS Level examinations, no student gained A - C pass grades and 50 per cent failed to get any pass grades.

152. The standards of work seen in Year 12 are generally below average. Most students are able to carry out simple experimental procedures, but are unable to understand complex measurements such as measuring with a micrometer screw gauge. Work on experimental investigations shows that students' ability to interpret results and graphical data is weak. Their ability to write conclusions is also under-developed. There is very little independent writing. Students in Year 12 have good prior attainment with a range of A, B and C passes in GCSE Double Award science. They are motivated and have the capacity to achieve more than they are currently achieving.

153. The attainment of students in Year 13 is below average. Higher attaining students are able to calculate, for example, the angular diameter of the sun and the moon as observed from the earth using the small angle approximation, but they are unable to explain how this approximation is arrived at and why the angle needs to be in radians.

154. Until recently, the quality of teaching and learning has been unsatisfactory. Students' progress has been hampered by the lack of a physics teacher for at least a term during which period students have had to draw on their own resources. Teaching seen during the inspection was just satisfactory. Lesson planning is generally sound, but learning objectives are not always explicit and work in Year 12 is sometimes pitched at an undemanding level. Relationships are good and teachers show enthusiasm for the subject. These factors contribute to learning and so do students' own efforts in lessons. However, the style of teaching offers very few opportunities for students to discuss ideas and concepts: this inhibits their progress.

155. Marking is routine and does not provide sufficient constructive comments on students' work. Day-to-day assessment and feedback to students on how to improve is weak. Teachers are not fully aware of what students understand and can do and what they do not understand and cannot do. This hinders teachers' capacity to improve learning and enhance achievement.

156. After a period of instability due to teacher shortages, there is now an opportunity to begin to address the issues raised in this report. Until recently, leadership and management have been unsatisfactory. The acting head of science is now providing sound leadership for physics and, under the circumstances, managing the subject satisfactorily.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teacher knowledge and understanding that ensures good learning.
- Good resources and accommodation that improves learning opportunities in ICT.
- The use of ICT is not being planned for in most subjects and there is too little subject specific software.

Commentary

157. At the end of Year 12, standards are well below average and pupils do not do well in the GCE AS and GNVQ Intermediate examinations. The main reason for this is because each of the exams is too difficult for the students involved. Standards in Year 13 have continued to improve and are now average. This is a result of good teaching and the positive attitudes of the students.

158. Sixth form students work confidently at their computers and have chosen tasks that have relevance to their everyday lives. These include the design of a database and hardware solutions for a hairdressers, a social club and a disc jockey. Many of the GNVQ students show good levels of achievement because of their low starting points. Particularly for these students, there is too little emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy that would further improve their performance.

159. Teaching and learning are consistently good. This is a result of good planning, good organisation and good teacher knowledge of ICT. This ensures that the students are able to make good progress in the examination work expected. The resources and learning environment make a significant contribution to students' learning opportunities. A significant amount of their work has to be completed outside normal lesson time and students obtain good feedback on this. They have a good record of work.

160. The management and leadership of the department are good and sixth form work is well organised. The programme for the monitoring of teaching is contributing to the improvement in learning. Good progress has been made in resolving issues raised in the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

161. In subjects inspected in the sixth form, the use of ICT was unsatisfactory. Students use the Internet for research and word processing. This is mostly at their own initiative as there is very little planned use of ICT and too little software that subjects could use to improve students' knowledge and understanding. Out of lesson time, sixth formers make good use of computers in the library.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results were below average in 2003.
- Standards are rising, students achieve well and more of them are demonstrating the potential to reach the highest grades.
- Teachers have a very good command of their subject.
- Students enjoy history, see the value of it and adopt a very mature approach to their studies.

Commentary

162. The percentage of students attaining the higher A-level grades was well below average in 2003. However, although standards in Year 13 are below average overall, in work seen during the inspection, a significant minority of students is now operating at grades A and B potential and standards are rising. In Year 12, for example, students can give convincing reasons as to why the Weimar Republic was doomed to fail from the very beginning and in Year 13, they speak about the several strands to the Unification of Italy with confidence.

163. Because teachers place emphasis on the differing views of major historians and because they encourage their students to pursue individual research, achievement is good across both years in the Sixth Form. Students use historical terms extensively and have good background knowledge to the topics under consideration. Moreover, most can write with fluency and can justify their views convincingly. Considering the wide range of prior attainment on entry to the Sixth Form, students make good progress in understanding some quite complex topics, the New Poor Law for example.

164. Teachers are able to ask challenging, yet realistic questions of their students because their subject knowledge of their specialist topics is very secure. They fascinate their students with a fund of anecdotes, always relevant and often amusing. Students respond positively and have good relationships with their teachers, of whom they speak highly. Students see the value of historical study and a good proportion have plans to study the subject at university. Teaching is, therefore, never less than good and there are examples of where it is very good.

165. Leadership and management are good and have ensured a consistency in the quality of teaching, thought-provoking and challenging resources and a steady improvement in students' performance. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory and the department has a clear vision for future development.

Psychology

Overall provision is **unsatisfactory** largely because of the limited teaching time available through the consortium arrangements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' knowledge of the subject is good, providing a secure basis for students to achieve.
- Students are polite and keen to learn.
- Standards at AS level are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory; students are not performing to the level expected at this stage in the course.
- Marking is uneven across the two teaching groups, and does not provide students with sufficient guidance on how to improve; recording of students' progress is unsatisfactory overall.
- Consortium arrangements are unsatisfactory resulting in insufficient teaching time and a high drop-out rate as students struggle to keep up with the work.

Commentary

166. Attainment in the current A2 group of six students ranges from above to below average and achievement is satisfactory. Students are gradually building on the work they did at AS level and are beginning to recall a wider range of evidence to support their arguments. For example, when

evaluating the different causes of depression, they draw on evidence relating to drug therapy, diet, conditioning techniques, social and cultural factors.

167. Standards at AS level are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory. The majority of the students are not reaching the standards expected as measured by their prior attainment at GCSE. The AS students try hard, but struggle to complete the depth and breadth of work required to gain a good pass, and there are gaps in the notes within their files. There is little evidence of students using computers other than occasionally word processing their essays and some searching on the Internet. Few students list the references used to support their arguments.

168. Teaching in the two lessons observed was good in Year 12 and satisfactory in Year 13. The two teachers have a secure command of the subject, which helps students focus on relevant research when responding to questions and taking notes. Probing questions encourage students to consider their answers more carefully and make more measured psychological judgements. In the good lesson comprising only the students from Erith, the teacher explained the task and concepts very clearly, provided structured support materials and focused sharply on the examination requirements. The students were confident in asking questions, produced accurate responses and worked at a good pace throughout the lesson. However, within the limited formal teaching time available, there is little time for structured revision.

169. Students are polite and want to do well. Although teachers provide students with a good range of resources and support materials to help them study outside of the classroom, and homework generally builds well on the content of the taught lessons, most find it difficult to keep up with course requirements.

170. Teachers give good oral feedback in lessons, but the marking of work is sometimes superficial comprising occasional ticks and little constructive feedback on how it could be improved. Some minor grammatical and spelling errors are also overlooked. The school assessment system of grading on a scale of A - E for attainment is used. However, the grades given do not relate well enough to the level of attainment as measured by the AS or A2 standards. This results in students having an inaccurate idea of how they are performing and unsatisfactory tracking of their progress.

171. Management is unsatisfactory because there is nobody with the overall responsibility for monitoring standards across classes. Another major area of difficulty relates to the teething troubles the school has experienced in organising the course through the consortium of Erith, Welling and Bexleyheath. The resulting very large classes and reduced amount of teaching time have contributed to the high drop-out rate in Year 12.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are good
- There is consistently good teaching as teachers have very good subject knowledge
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good and contribute to the positive attitudes to sociology.

Commentary

172. Results in examinations for 2002 were above the national average and results in 2003 are similar. Students make good progress in sociology.

173. In their research projects, higher attaining students have an appropriate grasp of theory, and are developing knowledge of significant case studies. Work is well presented and organised. Year

12 students have an appropriate understanding of the issues of wealth, poverty and welfare. They can identify significant studies, and are able to refer to the important ideas these offer. Year 13 students can discuss with conviction the way the media can amplify deviance and can explore the implications this has for society.

174. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is used well to stimulate their students. Lessons are appropriately planned. Teachers consistently reiterate important elements required in examinations so that students know what is expected of them. Teachers mark set essays and go through portfolios of work with each student on a regular basis. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject is used to give students important information in lessons and they take careful notes. Well chosen text books are also used well to teach students essential methodology, concepts and theory. In lessons, students' discuss information in a mature and thoughtful way, but can be too dependant on their teachers' help with linking ideas and using findings from research and other sources.

175. The department is appropriately led on a temporary basis by one of the sociology teachers who is also an assistant head. Resources and accommodation are good. Sociology was not reported in the last inspection, but standards have been maintained effectively.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Media studies A level was sampled. In the lesson seen teaching and learning were good and students' achievements were satisfactory. A well chosen video successfully engaged and interested students.

Art and Design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and the subject is very well led.
- Students receive individual tutorial support in lessons.
- Critical studies and use of sketchbooks are well developed.
- Careers advice is very good within the department.
- There is no technical support for teachers.
- There are insufficient facilities for ICT.

Commentary

176. In 2003 A level examinations, 100 per cent of students entered gained A – G grades. Over half (57 per cent) achieved the higher A – C grades. The subject is gaining in popularity. Careers advice within the subject is very good. Students are aware of the prestigious new career opportunities awaiting well-qualified visual arts graduates. Achievement overall is good.

177. Students in Year 12 build effectively on prior attainment and settle quickly to meet the demands of the A level course. Students in Year 13 demonstrate increasing maturity. Higher attaining students are appropriately challenged to pursue deeper insights into issues related to personal interests. A male student for example, works sensitively and diligently, endeavouring to capture elements of the moving image, skilfully combining time lapses in a film storyline with the confines of traditional artwork, to depict a journey through time. Similarly, a female student sets herself high standards when analysing how artists depict human emotions such as love and hate. She takes a philosophical and moral stance when analysing methods by which society inculcates values of right and wrong into children through fairy stories and compares this with works by Paula Rego depicting dark recollections from childhood.

178. Teaching is very good. It is individually tailored to each student's needs. Teachers know students well, share high expectations and provide good role models. As in the main school, teachers have to spend too much time preparing materials through lack of technical support. Good assessment information is shared regularly with students so that they know how to improve. Lack of effective ICT facilities impedes progress.

179. Leadership is very good. There are clear strategies for development. Under the direction of the newly appointed head of department, the specialist staff, who are also new to the school, have quickly become a formidable team. They generously share practical expertise, which benefits students, who gain from a variety of approaches to learning. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Drama and theatre studies

Provision in Drama and Theatre Studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department has good purpose-built accommodation and is well resourced.
- A head of department, who will complete a staff of three specialists, has yet to be recruited.
- The Head of Creative Arts provides good teaching, leadership and management.
- Standards attained by the four students who took A level in 2003 were high.
- Attainment at AS level was below average.
- Inclusion is a strong feature of work in the subject.

Commentary

180. The standards attained by the four students who took the Advanced Level examination in 2003 were above average, two gaining A grades, one a B and one a C. In the same year, the AS results showed all students passed, but with a spread of grades from B to E. Achievement by the Advanced Level group was very good. In spite of their lower grades, the Year 12 students' achievement was satisfactory in relation to their previous attainment.

181. Standards seen in the inspection week reflect this range. Practical drama, in both Years 12 and 13, was very good. High quality work on improvisation and the creation and exploration of character was seen in all the classes observed. Students show good understanding of the disciplines and possibilities of drama. They work confidently and collaboratively with their teacher and with one another and are able to discuss and evaluate their practical work very usefully. Written work is not of the same standard and there are limitations of vocabulary and language use even though folders show that students are tackling their written assignments conscientiously and with interest.

182. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and very effective use is made of the flexible studio accommodation and the resources available in the Creative Arts block. In the lessons seen, all students were responding very positively to lively teaching. The teacher's enthusiasm, subject expertise and performance skills motivated the class and ensured high levels of involvement and enjoyment. In the schemes of work and lesson planning, more time could be allocated to improving relevant vocabulary and writing skills and ensuring that students are as confident with theory and text as they clearly are with their practical work. Some reluctance on the part of students themselves to get to grips with this aspect of their work is indicated by the poor attendance at the 'drama clinic' offered by the department for this purpose in a lunch hour.

183. Boys are in the minority in both year groups, but the imbalance does not affect the quality of the good collaborative work seen in all lessons. Students with special educational needs achieve well. In two lessons observed, the very effective partnership of teacher, learning assistant and other students gave excellent support to a student who was determined not to allow his disability to

prevent his taking part fully in the class activities. Outcomes were impressive. This was a triumphant practical demonstration of the school's inclusive practice.

184. A Level students benefit from a well established tradition of drama in the main school and in the GCSE examination. 40 students in 2003 attained A*-C grades which were not far below the national average and, with this background, it is surprising that the numbers taking A and AS drama have not been higher. However, there have been acute staffing difficulties over the past year and the staff now in post are working hard to restore stability and confidence and to take the department forward. The A and AS Level drama work is shared by two specialist teachers, one of whom is the head of faculty, currently acting as head of drama pending a new appointment. Her leadership and management are good. A departmental handbook has been introduced and there are promising short and long term plans for improving practice, training, communication and resources.

185. Post-16 drama students take part in the regular school productions, large scale and small, which involve drama, music and dance and which bring together students from all parts of the school. Through these activities, they make contact with other disciplines and with the wider local community. Drama, in the sixth form as in the earlier years, contributes much to the school's wide-ranging extra-curricular programme and it is a significant factor in students' personal and social development.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Leisure and tourism

Within this curriculum area there are three courses: AVCE travel and tourism, or AVCE leisure and recreation as a single award; and GNVQ leisure and tourism at Intermediate level. All these courses were observed during the inspection. One lesson was seen in AVCE leisure and recreation. Learning was very good. Students made very good progress due to very good teaching and their own very good attitudes and behaviour.

Provision in all three leisure and tourism courses is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Student achievement and progress in lessons is good because of good and sometimes very good teaching.
- Students' often very positive attitudes have a strong influence on their progress.
- The quality of leadership and management is good.
- Standards of attainment are above average, albeit with very small numbers, although students do not yet have the understanding and skills to achieve the highest grades.
- Teachers within the two school faculties delivering these courses should collaborate more closely to share their expertise.

Commentary

186. Students' achievement and progress is good, given their prior attainment at the end of Year 11. Since the examination was introduced two years ago, all those in Year 13 on the AVCE courses have passed, although the overall numbers involved have been small. The proportions of pass and merit grades on the GNVQ course have also been above average. Standards of work seen are in line with those nationally and reflect the considerable progress that the current students have made due to both good and sometimes very good teaching. The students' positive attitudes towards their studies and to those who teach them also helps contribute to their success. Both male and female students work very well together, although it is the latter who are making the fastest progress. Only on the GNVQ course is the erratic attendance of some limiting their potential. Retention rates have been below average previously, although they have also improved. A scrutiny of work during the

inspection, together with discussions with students, demonstrated their good levels of knowledge and understanding. All the students on the AVCE courses have improved their knowledge and skills as they progressed through Year 12 and into Year 13.

187. The students benefit from teachers' very careful planning and preparation of lessons reflecting the use of a wide range of teaching techniques and an imaginative use of resources. These include good links with local leisure and tourism businesses and the community sports centre on the school site. High standards of independent research reflect teachers' expectations and help play a major role in students' good personal development. But the more able need to develop further their critical thinking and skills of analysis and synthesis to achieve the higher grades. Some students make very good use of ICT to research and present their coursework, but access to networked computers sometimes limits their progress. Students' analysis of their own and others' performance and teachers' own written feedback reflect thorough assessment practice that leads to improved achievement. To improve further, questioning in class should be more challenging of individuals and linked to short-term targets for improvement.

188. Leadership and management are both good. The success of these courses reflects the high aspirations of all those involved. There are strong links with the senior leadership team. These have helped to bring about good progress against the overall issues for improvement for vocational courses identified at the last inspection. To improve further, the physical education and humanities faculties should collaborate where there are opportunities to combine teaching, improve the quality of assessment and moderate the standards of coursework.

BUSINESS

Business education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some good teaching is helping students do relatively well at AS and A Level.
- Teachers have a good command of their subject and good relationships with students: as a result students have very good attitudes and are well motivated.
- Resources, including those for information and communication technology, are used well to support learning and teaching.
- A greater focus is needed on developing and improving business education so that the take-up of vocational courses is improved and the links with business and industry are strengthened.

Commentary

189. Standards in business education are below average, but students achieve relatively well given their starting points and prior attainment. The 2003 examination results show that a relatively high number of students achieved a pass in the GNVQ course, but standards seen in lessons are not as good. There are only six students following the course and their achievements are satisfactory at best, often because they lack the necessary literacy skills to develop their understanding. The AS and A Level results for 2003 were below average, but better than the previous year. Students did relatively well when their low starting points are taken into account. This is confirmed by lessons: standards are below average, but students achieve well considering their GCSE results. Not surprisingly, those students who follow the GCSE business studies course do best, but the department is also successful in helping lower attainers to gain at least a pass at A Level.

190. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is some good teaching which is particularly successful in promoting students' learning and achievement. An important strength in the teaching

is the good command teachers have of their subject: they use their knowledge and experience to make topics relevant. Sometimes, teachers use teaching styles that challenge and provide a range of learning styles. In one very good lesson, for example, students had to present their research findings about job motivation to the rest of the class. This stretched them very effectively: they developed both their understanding of the ideas and their self-confidence. Another characteristic is the good relationships teachers have with their students. Together, these strengths have a strong impact on students' attitudes and they are well motivated and mostly interested in their work. This is one of the reasons why students do relatively well in examinations: good subject knowledge and relationships promotes learning successfully.

191. There are some weaknesses in teaching. Questions are not always used to probe understanding or extend learning. For example, some teachers ask questions which require only simple one word answers or ask only some students in the class to respond. This does not do enough to challenge students' thinking or ensure that everyone has understood. Another weakness is that sometimes the teacher talks too much and this gives little opportunity for students to be involved in their learning: they are passive for much of the lesson.

192. There is a good range of resources, particularly for information and communication technology, and these are used well to promote students' learning. This is one of the reasons why students are skilled in using information and communication technology.

193. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, but there are areas for development. A stronger emphasis on improving the school's provision for business education is needed as part of a wider vocational offer. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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