

INSPECTION REPORT

The Downs School

Compton

LEA area: Newbury

Unique reference number: 110102

Headteacher: Mr Graham Taylor

Lead inspector: Mrs Susan Chamberlain

Dates of inspection: 24th - 27th February, 2004

Inspection number: 259212

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll;	939
School address:	Compton Newbury Berkshire
Postcode:	RG20 6NU
Telephone number:	01635 270000
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Cownley
Date of previous inspection:	23 rd February, 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Downs School is a Beacon School which has recently gained language status. It serves the community of Compton and surrounding villages, where there is some very advantageous and also some considerably disadvantaged housing. It is an averaged sized school which is significantly oversubscribed and is seriously outgrowing its accommodation. The proportion of students with special educational needs, including those with statements, is 9.6 per cent which is below average as is the proportion with statements is 1.6 per cent. Most students have White British heritage. The percentage of students for whom English is an additional language is 1.2 per cent, which is low. More students have joined the school in the last year than have left it. Students enter the school with average levels of attainment, overall, although their standards of literacy are above average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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19983	Haydn Webb	Team inspector	Science
19613	Susan Thomas Pounce	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
11190	Winifred Burke	Team inspector	Art
31963	Malcolm Padmore	Team inspector	Design and technology
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	History
8672	Mike Roberts	Team inspector	Geography
4749	Martin Ash	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
15304	Reg Fletcher	Team inspector	Music
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school. Nearly all aspects are strong enabling a very good ethos. Examination results are rising and students are achieving very well. Strong links with the community, especially those concerned with the specialist language college status, offer students rich connections with the wider world. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school is an effective Beacon School.
- Teaching and learning are very good and, consequently, standards are well above average.
- Leadership and management are very good, overall; leadership by the headteacher is extremely effective.
- Students' achievement is very good.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good and reflect the high standards of care and guidance they receive.
- Community language links are very strong.
- With some exceptions, much of the accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- In Years 10 and 11, there is insufficient time allocated for some students to fully meet statutory requirements in religious education and information and communication technology (ICT).

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection; all key issues have been addressed. Improved examination results, Beacon and Language College status, a considerably developed sixth form and a school significantly oversubscribed are just a few of the indicators of the school's increased effectiveness.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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

The achievement of students, including those with special educational needs, who speak English as an additional language or are especially high attaining, is very good. Standards are well above average throughout the school when taking work seen and examination results into account. GCSE results are well above average as are those in Year 9 statutory tests; both compare well with students' previous attainment. Students' competency in literacy and numeracy is very good. Although satisfactory in terms of national comparisons, students' competency in ICT is below that evident in other subjects.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Both the attitudes and behaviour of students are very good.

Students' attendance is good as is their punctuality. Relationships are good and students have high levels of self esteem.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good as is teaching and learning overall. Teaching is best in Years 10 to 13. Teachers are highly committed and make learning fun. Overall, assessment is very good. It is, however, lacking in information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 for those students who have not opted for an examination course in the subject. The curriculum is very good in Years 7 to 11. Opportunities for enrichment are very good although the need to bus students home does inhibit some students' opportunities to attend after school activities. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The increased number of students has outgrown the present range of buildings. Resources are satisfactory. Pastoral care is a very strong feature of the school; students are given very good personal advice and guidance. The relationship with parents is good. Parents are supportive and feel they are well informed about their children's progress. Community involvement, including that in the wider world, contributes very well to students' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very effective; the school receives an excellent lead from the headteacher who is very well supported by his senior team and middle management. Governance of the school is very good. The governing body is supportive but challenging and fully involved in any financial or other developments, working with key staff on the school development plan.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are pleased with the quality of education and care that the school provides and have a positive impression of the school. Some would like advice from the school on how to help their children at home. Likewise, students enjoy school, where they feel safe and are able to do their best.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Revamp the accommodation, taking care to check out specification of new buildings to ensure that they meet the needs of the school fully.

And to fully meet statutory requirements:

- in religious education and information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 where some students receive too little exposure.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE DOWNS SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

Although this sixth form has been smaller than others, it is expected that numbers promised for September 2004 will bring it to an above average size. It offers a good range of subjects at AS and A2 levels and has a growing vocational dimension. The sixth form is financially viable and provides very good value for money.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The sixth form has grown significantly and offers students a very good facility
- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Students receive very good guidance and, consequently, are very positive about the sixth form.
- Leadership of the sixth form is extremely effective.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and is restricting the desired development of the vocational curriculum which is in its infancy.

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	Very good. Teaching is very good. An imaginative interpretation of the A level English literature syllabus results in very good achievement and well above average standards at the end of the course.
Drama	Very Good. Teaching is very good. The chance for students to apply the working methods of influential drama practitioners to some very imaginative drama activities results in their achieving above average standards.
Media Studies	Very Good. Teaching is very good. The students' enthusiasm for the subject results in students achieving well in both their practical and academic studies, with standards being well above average by the end of Year 13.
French	Very good. Standards are above average in Years 12 and 13. Teaching is very good; students are given challenging tasks. Students achieve well and are making good progress.
Mathematics	Good. Standards have improved and were well above average in 2003 A2 examinations. Teaching is good. Students achieve well.
Biology	Good. Interested and diligent students are working to standards within course requirements.
Chemistry	Excellent. This is a modern and challenging course that engages highly motivated students leading to outstanding standards and exceptional examination success.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Standards, achievements, teaching and learning are satisfactory. This is an improving area where students enjoy the course.
Design and Technology	Very good. Standards are high. Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning. Students enjoy the course.
Geography	Good. Standards are in line with expectations because of good teaching and learning.
History	Very good. Standards are well above average as a result of very good teaching. Students are committed and enthusiastic and respond very positively to the good relationships established by the teacher.
Psychology	Satisfactory. Standards are average and students achieve satisfactory results. Teaching and learning are good.
Art and Design	Satisfactory. Standards are average and teaching, learning and achievement are satisfactory. Students' attitudes are very positive.
Law	Good. Standards are in line with national expectations. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and learning.
Music	Very Good. Standards, achievement, teaching and learning are very good across both A1 and A2 courses in music and A1 course in music technology. The creative use of technology in all courses is particularly strong.
Physical Education	Very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve well. Previous results indicate similar very high standards. Very good teaching leads to well focused learning.
Business Education	Very good. Standards are high and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good, often very good. The department is keen that students gain real business experience and consequently have established many contacts.

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

The provision for students' welfare, support, advice and guidance is very good. Students are very well supported during their coursework and are very well prepared for higher education.

Curriculum

The sixth form A-level curriculum is very good. It is unusually broad in the range of courses it provides, catering for every student's needs, including the provision of separate sciences for intending medical students. The vocational curriculum is underdeveloped for want of sufficient suitable accommodation and resources to meet the needs of rapidly growing numbers of students, including new entrants to the school from other establishments,

All sixth formers enjoy a full range of curriculum enrichment opportunities. They also enjoy higher education "fairs" at Reading University and their director of studies enables a number of "taster" opportunities both for those students intending to begin work and the vast majority who are going on to further and or higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good with an excellent vision being established by the head of sixth form. This ensures that all students can be included. Systems and procedures are well implemented.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy the sixth form and are pleased that they stayed at this school. Most feel that they have chosen the right courses and are enjoying their studies. They like the way everyone knows each other and are impressed by the helpfulness and commitment shown by their teachers. They feel that they are treated like adults. Many students would like to have a specified work room and comment on the inadequacy of available space. They would like more sports and other activities, for example team building exercises and trips abroad. They would also like to see more courses available for lower attainers.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The standards achieved, including those of students with learning difficulties and those of students whose first language is not English, are **well above** national expectations and students' achievement is **very good** by the end of Years 9 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is very good.
- GCSE results are well above average.
- Results in statutory tests are well above average.
- Students' competency in literacy and numeracy are well above average.
- Students' competency in ICT is below that of other subjects.
- Students in the sixth form achieve very well.

Commentary

Key Stage 3

1. In 2003, results in statutory tests were well above average in English, mathematics and science with girls outperforming boys in English and boys outperforming girls in mathematics and science. Overall, scores were above average when compared with students' prior attainment. In the work seen, standards were above average in most subjects, well above in English, music, design and technology and science and average in history and ICT. Standards are steadily rising at a faster rate than the national trend. Students achieve very well overall. In 2002, West Berkshire statistics indicated that students in Years 7 to 9 made the most gains in the authority. Particularly good achievement is noted in English, mathematics, design and technology, music and languages and in science it is excellent. Least progress occurs in ICT where students make satisfactory gains but are restricted because their lower school course finishes at the end of Year 8.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.6 (37.6)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	37.9 (40.2)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	37.2 (39.1)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 148 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Key Stage 4

2. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average for 5 A* to C, 5 A* to G and 1 A* to G grades and when compared with students' previous attainment at the end of Year 9. Standards are rising broadly in line with those found nationally. Girls outperform boys at this level but boys' results are still well above the national average for boys. In the work seen, standards were well above average in English, mathematics, drama, science, art, music, design and technology and languages, above average in geography, history, physical education and citizenship and average elsewhere.

3. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is still very good. It is best in English, drama, art, music, history, languages, design and technology and physical education. Achievement is exceptional in science, where students' interest levels are elated by the very exciting teaching they receive.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	70 (71)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	42.4 (40.5)	34.7(34.8)

There were 172 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. At all levels, students demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are well above the national norm across the range of subjects they study. Likewise literacy skills are well above average and students are noticeably very articulate. Students vary in their competence in ICT. Those who take examinations in the subject are considerably more adept than those who do not. However, their competence is satisfactory overall.

5. Students with special educational needs achieve very well because of the high standard of support they receive from subject teachers and from learning support assistants. By the end of Year 9 the majority of those on the register of special needs have progressed to the point where they no longer need special help.

Sixth form

6. Students do well in the sixth form. In 2003, the results gained at A/AS levels were in line with national averages for grades A to E and just below for the higher grades A to B but students' average point scores were above national figures. In the work seen, standards were well above expectations in English, media, biology, product design, history and physical education and very high in chemistry. They were above expectation in drama, languages and business education and satisfactory elsewhere. Students achieve very well, particularly so in science. Quite a number have worked very hard to achieve the very good GCSE results they gained at the end of Year 11 and find the next stage in the sixth form quite difficult.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

7. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal, including their moral, social and cultural development are very good. Attendance is above average and punctuality is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy school and participate very well in learning and extra-curricular activities.
- Behaviour is almost always very good. On the rare occasions when it isn't students involved receive very effective help from the Student Support Unit.
- Students make very good progress towards becoming mature and responsible people.

Commentary

8. Students express very positive views about the school. They value the teaching and support they receive and make the most of the wide range of activities. They are keen to do as well as they can and co-operate very well with their teachers.

9. Students' very good behaviour contributes considerably to their progress in lessons. Students get on very well together, are tolerant and are mutually supportive. Incidents of anti-social behaviour are very few and are dealt with very effectively. The number of exclusions is less than the average for secondary schools of similar size. Very effective support is provided, for example through the student support unit, for those few students who have difficulty in exercising self-control.

10. Students take on responsibility very well. They command great respect as members of the influential school council. They achieve a very good level of independence, are confident and socially mature by the time they reach the end of Year 11. Attendance was slightly above average last year and has improved since. Unauthorised absence was very low. Punctuality is good.

11. Overall the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The spiritual aspect is good. The school has worked hard in strengthening this particular provision and so progress on this since the last inspection has been good. Students have the opportunity to be quiet and reflect in tutor times and in assemblies. The very well developed assembly programme with its many themes and activities and the work done in tutorial times means that statutory requirements for collective worship are being met. Some subject areas also give students the opportunity to develop spiritual awareness. These include religious education and also drama where students use dance as a means of calm reflection. The general caring ethos of the school also gives its students a sense of value and worth. Many subject departments such as music help students to develop their creative side.

12. Provision for moral development is very good; the students' attitudes and behaviour reflect this. The students are expected to behave well and have a clear sense of right and wrong. Codes of conduct and good examples set by staff make an important input to this. Work in the personal, social and health programme cover many topics of a moral nature. These include drugs and alcohol education. Visitors to the school such as the police also add to this provision.

13. Provision for social development is very good. Many activities both within the school and outside it, such as clubs and visits to theatres and abroad enable the students to develop positive relationships. Students are developing their understanding of citizenship through the citizenship programme which is operating in the school. Students participate in school and wider community in various ways. The many charity activities are but one example. The students can take responsibility through the prefect system and school council and by helping with younger members of the school. Many students choose to take up these activities.

14. Provision for cultural development is good. Students have opportunity to appreciate their own cultural traditions by going on field trips and participating in poetry days. There are many opportunities for students to appreciate the cultural traditions of others. In art, for example, students study artistic traditions in Japan, India, and Eastern Europe. The European Day and World Challenge also raise students' awareness of cultures beyond their own and help them learn from them.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data:	7.9
National data:	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data :	0.1
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 students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	860	36	1
White – Irish	6		
White – any other White background	18		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1		
Mixed – White and Black African	2		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	8		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	3		
Any other ethnic group	2		
No ethnic group recorded	29		

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

Sixth Form

15. Students have a high level of commitment to the school and their studies. They develop very well the skills required for effective independent learning. They enjoy being in the sixth form and are pleased with the range of courses available. They value very much the helpfulness of their teachers. They take advantage of the many enrichment experiences such as the world challenge visit to Zambia. Students organize extensive fund raising events and engage in community service. They relate to each other very well and their conduct is mature. They carry out their duties as prefects and council members in a very responsible manner. They make a commendable contribution generally to the school community. Attendance is good but some students do not arrive on time for the start of the school day.

16. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the sixth form is very good. Students attend school assemblies where they have ample opportunity to be quiet and reflect on a range of topical issues which are presented there. Regular tutor reviews are very supportive

and help the students develop a personal sense of value and worth. There is a wide input to students' moral and social development. Modules in general studies cover topics like rights, respect and capital punishment. Many themes in school assemblies also cover moral and social issues. Students take responsibility and develop positive relationships through activities like community service and the prefect system. Cultural awareness and development, both of their own and of others, is developed through some units of work on religious education. There is also a more practical dimension to this when students participate in World Challenge.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

17. **The quality of education is very good.** Students receive very good support and guidance. The school's language college status ensures that they frequently link with many other schools and the wider community.

Teaching and learning

18. Teaching and learning are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school and best in Years 10 to 13.
- One in fourteen lessons are excellent
- Four in every five lessons are good or better.
- Gifted and talented students are well supported.
- Students with special educational needs are well taught.

Commentary

19. Teaching is very good. The students receive a high number of very good and excellent lessons from which they learn very well. A very high proportion of lessons are good or better, culminating in a very positive learning experience. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, except in information and communication technology and religious education where some students do not receive their full entitlement. However, a large number who take examination courses in these subjects are taught very well. Inspectors found no unsatisfactory teaching. Learning matches teaching, being slightly less effective in Years 7 to 9 than in other years.

20. Teachers meet all the necessary requirements to ensure that their teaching results in lessons which are successful. They plan carefully, use a wide range of strategies, work a three part lesson and respond very well to the individual needs of all their students. They know their students well and have a clear idea of their levels of attainment. Consequently, students learn very effectively, enjoy their lessons and have a good idea of how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve.

21. In the many excellent lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects is a strong feature. Pace is very brisk and teachers' and students' expectations are high. Challenging, open and thoughtful questions contribute well to students' learning. Strong levels of support are evident and students' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are excellent. Teachers are confident in their explanations and provide a secure learning environment. Illustrations are relevant, exciting and often relate to students' experiences as in the case of a "mexican wave" being used in science to explain oscillation. Lessons have a clear structure; objectives are shared with students and excellent plenary sessions ensure that the necessary learning has occurred.

22. Paired discussion is apparent in some very good lessons. For example in geography, students' learned well from these, being keen to offer concluding opinions, which they expressed well. Very good planning features significantly. Nearly all lessons are very well planned and have relevant assessment procedures inbuilt. Students learn most effectively when the lesson contains a

series of short activities. In very good lessons, emphasis on individual skills is apparent, particularly in physical education, music and design and technology. Teachers give good demonstrations and share their expertise sufficiently to ensure that good visual images are available for students to emulate and even improve upon.

23. Gifted and talented students are well supported. Teachers tap into many initiatives which help enrich their curricular experience. Departmental programmes of enrichment activities are supplemented by links with Oxford colleges and local educational authority initiatives. One student is a member of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth enabling participation in summer schools and on-line access which offers an increase in resources and improved opportunities to realise full potential.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 162 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
[12] (7.0 %)	[68] (42.0 %)	[53](33.0 %)	[29](18.0 %)	[0](0 %)	[0](0 %)	[0](0 %)

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

24. Students with special educational needs are well taught in the majority of subject lessons. They are provided for by materials specially tailored to their needs and the support and attention of dedicated support assistants. In individual and small group lessons that support literacy and numeracy, students are very well taught, which enables them to achieve very well.

Sixth Form

25. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good, overall. Teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subjects and provide good positive experiences upon which their students can build. They are able to clear up misunderstandings and extend topics beyond the necessary coverage in order to make them real and promote a deep appreciation of the knowledge imparted. Explanations are clear, expectations are high and enthusiasm is prevalent. Students work well together, willingly sharing their ideas. They are given the chance to develop good critical and analytical skills. They have many opportunities to control their own learning and enjoy researching topics using the Internet. They enhance their work by using good ICT skills. Interest levels are high and promote very good learning. Teachers are adept at questioning students in a manner that identifies varying levels of understanding. A seminar style used in history is very effective and serves to train students to think quickly about what to note and what to leave, preparing them well for university lectures.

Outstanding achievement was seen in an advanced level chemistry lesson. The teacher had so much enthusiasm for her subject that it was clearly infectious. Interest was also assured when she promised that by the end of the lesson they would know how to make trinitrotoluene (TNT). Many strands of the course were so cleverly interwoven into a lesson that was rich with meaningful everyday applications. The students just could not help but participate in the discussions. They confidently offered explorative new ideas and showed intuition into the way organic bonds are broken and reassembled to form dyes and medicines. Knowledge and understanding was pushed forward as an enjoyable experience. The students finally worked out the industrial process to make the explosive.

Assessment

26. Assessment is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very good whole school policy on marking, assessment, recording and reporting.
- Most departments have assessment systems which are very well organised.
- The quality of reporting is good.

Commentary

27. The system for assessment, recording and reporting students' attainment and progress is developing very well. General advice is given to help departments organise their own systems. Details are given to each teacher in their school handbook. There is a very good whole-school marking policy, which gives clear guidance to teachers, who give useful advice to individual students. Departments assess students against National Curriculum levels or GCSE criteria throughout the year. At the end of the year students are given National Curriculum grades in Years 7 to 9 or estimated GCSE grades in Year 10. The data is entered on the school system, and this is available to all staff. There is detailed analysis of the data, and this is communicated to subject departments. Some departments also have examples of students' work done at different levels. Some departments have better systems than others, but most are very good.

28. The assessment co-ordinator organises a good level of reporting to parents. There is at least one evening each year when parents discuss their child's progress with subject teachers. All parents have one progress report and one full report once per year with grades and targets. If there is a cause for concern, the school quickly contacts parents.

The curriculum

29. Provision in curriculum main school and sixth form is **very good**. Provision for enrichment is **very good**. However, accommodation is **unsatisfactory** whilst resources are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The breadth and balance of the main school curriculum is particularly good for a school of this size.
- The range and variety of A-level courses offered in the sixth form is very good.
- Enrichment of the curriculum through both timetabled and extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Good provision for personal, social and health education enables good personal development.
- The vocational curriculum 14 to 19, particularly in the sixth form, is underdeveloped for want of sufficient suitable accommodation and resources but the provision offered is good.
- The use of ICT across the curriculum is insufficiently well developed, and consequently, does not provide some students with a sufficient entitlement to fully meet statutory requirements, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Statutory requirements are not fully met in core religious education due to a shortage of time for about 50 per cent of Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

30. The curriculum for the main school is, overall, broad and balanced. In Years 7 to 9, dance and drama are not currently part of the main curriculum. In Years 10 and 11 students have a wide range of GCSE courses plus a few vocational subjects. Virtually all students achieve their preferred option choices at the end of Year 9. A good course in personal, social and health education covers drugs, sex, race, bullying and alcohol during three 25-minute tutor periods. Additionally, good advice is available on next steps in education and careers at key junctures: options and careers advice in Year 9 and throughout Years 10 and 11; work experience in Year 10 and a careers convention in Year 11.

31. The curriculum is enriched by an innovative programme of activities within the school day as well as curriculum extension groups, clubs and societies, drama, music and sports after school. These are complemented by a wide range of day visits and extended journeys overseas.

32. Students in Years 7 to 9 and those in Years 10 and 11 who follow the full GCSE course have access to at least two hours of quality sports provision per week. Students in Year 9 and those in Years 10 and 11 who do not follow the full GCSE course also have access to two hours of quality sports provision in their lesson time supplemented by planned opportunities to take part in extracurricular activities.

33. Despite the school's best efforts, the curriculum has limitations in information and communication technology, especially that taught across the curriculum as well as art, citizenship, music, indoor physical education and religious education. These shortfalls are due to constraints of time, accommodation or resources.

34. Curricular provision for students with special educational needs is very good. The school's ethos of inclusion and support for students with special educational needs have a positive impact on the social development and learning experience of these students as well as that of all other students in the school. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and support assistants are enthusiastic and committed to working with students with special educational needs. Their well-managed deployment ensures the curricular needs of students are very well met.

35. A very well organised department caters very well not just for students with special educational needs but also for those who are gifted and talented. A range of support is provided. Teaching assistants work with individuals and small groups of students in the classroom. They are particularly flexible and liaise very well with class teachers. Small groups are withdrawn for special support with literacy and numeracy programmes. Sessions about study skills are run for students in Years 10 and 11 and homework clubs are a regular feature of lunchtimes. Subject teachers plan specially tailored work for these students, but this is too often not well used in lessons.

36. Accommodation is unsatisfactory especially for the sixth form. There are not enough rooms to provide for A-level art teaching. Classes therefore have to share rooms so that when one teacher talks he or she interferes with the other adjacent class. Lack of storage and small classrooms also inhibit the scale of work that students can undertake. Media studies has to be taught in ordinary classrooms without appropriate computer facilities. Private study accommodation is inadequate for the sixth form at its current size. Given that numbers are set to rise substantially the position will be much worse. There is not enough indoor provision for physical education intensive use of the hall means that lesson time is wasted clearing up before and after breaks. The playing fields are often flooded which exacerbates the problem caused by the lack of indoor space. Teachers of modern languages have to carry audio visual equipment around the site because they have no specialist accommodation.

37. Resources are satisfactory. Most departments have enough equipment and textbooks. Mathematics is well resourced as a direct outcome of very good management but lack of access to computer facilities poses a problem for some departments.

Sixth form

38. The A-level curriculum is unusually broad in the range of courses it provides for a rapidly developing sixth form, newly established since the last inspection. It caters very well for all current students' needs including, for example, the provision of separate sciences for intending medical students. Discussions with students confirm that *all* are very satisfied with the courses they are able to pursue. They are confident of attaining their ambitions of taking up courses in further or higher education that lead to their chosen careers. Students' very positive attitudes are clearly evident in their enthusiasm for study as well as in their general demeanour and commitment to the school.

39. All sixth formers are able to enjoy a very full range of curriculum enrichment opportunities through both timetabled and extra-curricular activities. Many participate in team games, athletics and other sporting activities, as well as concerts, dramatic and musical stage shows both within school

and beyond. Many perform and compete at area and county level. Participation in sports activities both on and off-site is exceptionally high.

40. The vocational curriculum is yet underdeveloped for want of sufficient suitable accommodation and resources to meet the needs of rapidly growing numbers of students. These swelling numbers include new entrants to the school from other establishments. However, there are well laid plans to rectify this shortcoming within the next two years as new accommodation and resources are commissioned. These include significant improvements in the both the range of ICT equipment and its accessibility. These firm plans anticipate increasingly wide-ranging applications in study, research, design and the implementation of many aspects of both A-level and vocational coursework.

How well are students cared for, guided and supported?

41. Provision for care, including child protection, and guidance and support is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pastoral care is a very strong feature of the school.
- Health and safety procedures are very well managed overall.
- Academic and personal advice, guidance and support are very good.

Commentary

42. Relationships between teachers and students are purposeful, trusting and mutually respectful and create a very good learning climate and a caring community. Students are confident about referring to teachers for help and feel valued, cared for and safe. Teachers and helpers go to considerable lengths to meet the needs of the students. Procedures for child protection and children in care are in place and the arrangements for health and safety are mostly very good although a few matters were drawn to the school's attention during the inspection. Specialist education and health agencies provide relevant services to the school. Counselling and advisory facilities, including the weekly visit of a police officer, and access to a teenage information centre add very good and well-used forms of social support for students.

43. Students are inducted into the school with sensitivity. They are able to make representations through the very respected and influential school council. Students receive very good support from teaching assistants and a student support unit. Extra tuition is provided for lower attaining students in Year 7 and booster classes for Year 9 prior to National Curriculum tests. Homework clubs are available at lunchtimes. Students receive very good academic advice and guidance through the marking and targeting system. The school provides very good advice and information about subject options and post-16 opportunities.

Sixth form

44. Students rightly confirm that the sixth form meets their expectations well. They are very pleased by the very considerate way in which they are treated and feel secure and supported. They make the most of a very good range of enrichment opportunities and experiences that is provided for them. Students' coursework is very closely monitored. They are given very effective and timely feedback about their work with appropriate advice and guidance about how to improve and achieve their desired results.

45. Advice, information and guidance about opportunities beyond the sixth form are easily accessible. Assistance with applications is given; taster visits to universities and speakers from various establishments enhance students' awareness and preparation for higher education. Students' views are expressed mainly through the sixth form council and are always taken seriously by the school.

How well does the school work in partnership with parents, other schools and the community?

46. The school has a **good** partnership with parents, other schools and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents express confidence in the school and are supportive
- Parents are very well informed about students' progress
- Community involvement contributes very well to the school's wider curriculum
- Some aspects of the school's work with other schools and colleges are excellent

Commentary

47. The Downs School works very closely with other schools and the community to enhance students' learning and personal development. Parents are pleased with the quality of education and care that it provides and generally have a good opinion of the school. The information provided by the school is good although some parents say that they do not always receive it. The school has taken action to improve this by attaching acknowledgement slips to letters and using other means of communication such as e-mail. Information about students' progress is very good.

48. Parents support the school well by good attendance at various meetings and events and through the friends of school association. Some parents help in school and those who have children with special education needs are well involved in the review process. The school is not currently providing help and guidance to those parents who would like to be more able to assist their own children more with work at home. The school seeks and acts on parents' views mainly by sampling rather than surveying the views of all parents.

49. The school's premises are well used by community groups and for adult education classes. The community and relevant places of interest are used very well to enhance learning. Residential visits in this country and overseas contribute very well to students' cultural and personal development. Students undertake community service and enterprisingly support a wide range of charities at home and abroad. Employers support the school very well, particularly in connection with its recent application for specialist status.

50. The very good language links with the community appear elsewhere in the report. The school plays a major role in its educational community. It has assisted with the management of another school that had particular difficulties. It provides facilities and staff training for others. It has very good links with its primary partners that lead to the effective transfer of students, bridging projects and very well developed curricular development work that includes schools beyond its immediate cluster group. Arrangements with a college of further education contribute very well to vocational experiences for selected students as well as preparation for the next stage of their careers. Links with universities lead to exceptionally good awareness of and preparation for higher education. Student teachers make a valuable contribution to the life of the school and the education it provides.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

51. Leadership and management are **very good**, as is the governance of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership by the headteacher is exceptionally effective.
- The governing body is very supportive
- Financial control is very secure

- The plans for new accommodation are detailed. Soundproofing and similar specifications were not good enough in the last build so extra care is essential this time round.
- The head of sixth form manages the sixth form extremely effectively

Commentary

52. The headteacher has an excellent vision for the school which includes the maintenance and evolution of the sixth form. His commitment combined with a firm and humane approach has culminated in a school rated best in West Berkshire in 2002 for students' progress by the end of Year 9.

53. Years 10 and 11 also form part of a high performing organisation with two thirds higher grades at GCSE. Under the headteacher's leadership and management, the school has gained Beacon and Language status. It operates as a highly effective institution which caters for all students by offering a work related curriculum for those who require an alternative approach. A strong senior management team supports the headteacher well, each member offering expertise in one of the fields of curriculum, finance, pastoral care, assessment procedures and sixth form development.

54. The governing body is very effective. It works well with the senior management team both supporting and challenging innovation, which it expects to be an implicit part of the approved school development plan. Governors are usually present at formal school occasions but also attend departmental meetings and join in some lessons. The governing body draws on a whole range of expertise from individuals, the chair of the finance committee being a chartered accountant.

55. The leadership group is rigorous in its evaluation, making sure that lessons are observed regularly. It monitors the curriculum, finance and departmental progress as a matter of course. A strength is its commitment to monitoring students' achievement.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income*	2,799,916
Total expenditure*	2,741,146
Expenditure per student*	2,944

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	218,779
Balance carried forward to the next	277,550

Note* All excluding capital expenditure.

56. Financial control is very secure. Very good systems ensure that all expenditure is budgeted appropriately. All spending decisions relate to priorities for improvement as identified in the school development plan. Governors, the headteacher and his senior team are all given adequate financial information with which to inform their decisions. All those concerned strive to seek best value and are careful to seek expert advice on specifications of planned new builds. There are minor existing flaws, as in the case of doors in the music department which are insufficiently sound-proofed. The school provides very good value for money.

57. The co-ordinator of special needs manages her department very well. She leads a dedicated team very well, liaises very well with the mainstream school on behalf of students with special needs, and works very effectively with subject teachers to raise awareness of the needs of these students.

Sixth form

58. The head of sixth form is an extremely good leader. He has been crucially instrumental in the building of a strong sixth form which will have grown from 25 to 200 in five years. He has a clear vision to broaden the scope of the sixth form curriculum to include more fully students of lower ability. He has established a family feel with a particularly caring and mature ethos. Sixth formers can now study a wide range of subjects and, although some groups are small, most are of viable size and some are large. The sixth form is financially viable and provides very good value for money.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Community

59. Language links with the community were developed over several years through the Beacon school partnerships. Since the school gained language college status in September 2003 further links have been established and the overall provision is now very good. The director of the language college is a very committed, enthusiastic professional who recognises that support for students learning languages is increased by involving local schools and businesses and establishing links with schools abroad. The school has promoted the following initiatives with a view to extending opportunities for language development and improving the quality of its specialist provision:

- Organised in-service training for many primary and secondary school teachers
- Introduced Spanish and Japanese to the school curriculum
- in relation to boys' achievement, set up language at work conferences for local schools targeting modern foreign languages
- Organised a European day for local schools
- Taught Spanish to members of a local business concern
- Extended exchange provision with four schools abroad and facilitated email links
- Set up language at work scheme

60. After only a short time with language college status The Downs School is clearly recognised for its expertise in language development and teaching. Schools in the local area are already contacting the school for advice, guidance and professional development.

STUDENT SUPPORT UNIT – Special feature

61. The school has a special unit for supporting students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The unit was set up during 2003 and has been fully functional since September 2003. It currently caters for seven fully assessed students and a further 13 either in transition in or out of the unit or who are on a more flexible programme. These numbers are flexible as students move in and out of the care of the unit. Students are referred to the unit through their year heads, after recommendation by subject teachers and consultation with head of subject departments. After referral they are assessed in the classroom situation by expert support staff and a pastoral support plan is drawn up. The main objective of the work of the unit is to give students and teachers strategies for the management of unacceptable behaviour, and this is done in a sensitive and positive way. It is the SSU's policy to support students within the classroom and it is actually quite unusual for a student to be seen working in the isolation of the unit, which is a measure of its success. Students are being effectively managed in the classroom situation and are thus keeping up with their work and their social contacts. This provision is a very good feature of the school. It is being very well managed by the co-ordinator, who is a very effective leader, not only of her own small team of assistants but also of all members of staff who need support for students with behavioural difficulties.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4.

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good and makes a significant impact on students' achievement.
- Students display very positive attitudes to learning, achieving well above average standards at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE.
- The Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy is used and applied very effectively and contributes to the high standards achieved by students at the end of Year 9.
- Girls significantly outperform boys in GCSE English language.
- More able students are insufficiently challenged in the mixed ability classes in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

63. Attainment upon entry into school in all aspects of English is average. Students achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 so standards in English in Year 9 are well above average. This is reflected in the most recent national assessment tasks when attainment was well above the national average, though average when compared to schools with a similar intake. Students maintain very good achievement in Years 10 and 11 with standards once more being well above average, though girls significantly outperformed boys in the most recent GCSE English language examinations. Students with special educational needs receive very good support from teachers and learning support assistants so they make the same progress as all other members of the class.

64. The majority of students display very good oral skills with standards in Years 9 and 11, being well above average. Most students are confident in their ability to express their ideas and opinions in a logical, well-structured manner. They listen with interest to their teachers and value the ideas of others.

65. Although drama is not taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9 opportunities are given in English lessons for students to engage in role-play and debating activities and to interpret the plays they read from a dramatic point of view.

66. The majority of students are very good readers. Students have a very good vocabulary and display very good reading comprehension skills. This enhances their ability to read and understand the good range of poetry, novels and plays they read in Years 7 to 11. Critical and analytical skills are well taught in the school, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Chances are given in lesson times for students in Years 7 and 8 to visit the library on a regular basis to select and change books. This makes a positive contribution to the good reading habits displayed by most students. Standards in reading in Years 9 and 11 are well above average.

67. Students improve the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar in Years 7 to 9 and use them to good effect in a challenging and demanding range of English activities. These allow them to write in different styles and for different purposes. By the end of Year 9 many students produce very good extended essays. Students plan their work well and improve it over time through the good use of redrafting skills.

68. A large proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 develop the ability to make a strong personal response to the question asked of them as part of their coursework. They sustain a well reasoned written argument, supported by relevant information from the texts they study and well-selected quotations. Students take pride in their efforts and word-process their essays in order to improve their overall presentation. Standards in written work in Years 9 and 11 are well above average.

69. The very good work produced by the majority of students is much influenced by their very positive attitudes to work and their wish to learn.

70. The quality of teaching is very good with some excellent teaching being observed during the inspection. Lessons are extremely well planned, organised and managed with resources used in an effective manner to promote learning.

71. The department uses and applies the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy very well, with evidence from the scrutiny of students' written work that this is a significant factor in the high standards achieved by students in Years 7 to 9. Regular chances are given for students to take control of their own learning through well-planned group activities. Where teaching is at its best teachers give students the chance to make very good progress in oral, reading and writing activities within a single lesson, with each activity supporting and extending skills in the other. Although students with special educational needs receive very good support from their teachers and learning assistants, occasions were observed in the mixed ability classes in Years 7 to 9 where more able students in the class could have been challenged further.

72. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. In the comparatively short time she has been in post the Head of English has put together a very good handbook and range of documentation to support teachers in the delivery of the subject. There are very good schemes of work in place with very effective assessment systems informing students what they have to do to improve the quality of their work. All students have individual targets for improvement. The Head of English is aware of the areas for development identified in this report and is taking appropriate steps to address them.

73. Standards in English have much improved since the last inspection with progress being very good.

Literacy across the Curriculum

74. The planned provision for the development of literacy across the curriculum is good.

75. With the support of the local education authority literacy consultant all teachers have been involved in in-service training, with workshops focussing on such areas as sequenced writing, text types, modelling writing activities and the use of writing frames to support students in their written work.

76. It is expected that that individual subject handbooks address the issue of the development of literacy skills and planned strategies for improvement. The member of staff responsible for this area of the curriculum regularly samples students' written work in all subjects to see how effective strategies are. Some good examples of literacy can be found in the majority of subjects, in particularly those subjects which lend themselves to extended writing. These include history, geography, religious education, science, music and design technology.

French, German and Spanish

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all three languages.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Some teachers do not use the foreign language enough in the classroom.
- Students do not check their written work carefully enough to avoid basic errors.
- The department has insufficient specialist accommodation.

Commentary

78. Currently all students begin French in Year 7, and can continue with it to the end of Year 11. Almost all students in Year 8 also learn German or Spanish. Almost all students learn a language in Years 10 and 11.

79. Results in teacher assessments in French at the end of Year 9 were above national standards, in 2003. In comparison with national standards, French GCSE results were well above the national average in 2002 and 2003. GCSE results in German were well above average in 2002. They dropped to above average in 2003 because of staffing difficulties. Results in both languages were above those in most other subjects in the school in 2002 and 2003 in both languages. In the lessons seen, performance showed students working at higher levels than national expectations in French in Year 9. It was above expectations, in Year 11 in both languages. In both languages, students are stronger in listening, speaking and reading than in writing. There is a satisfactory amount of written exercises and sustained writing in both languages. However, students make unnecessary errors in grammar and spelling, which prevent them from achieving higher standards.

80. The quality of teaching in both French and German is very good, and has improved since the last inspection. The teaching of Spanish in Years 8 and 12 is good. Teachers are proficient in all three foreign languages and have good accents. They use French, German and Spanish for parts of the lesson to develop students' listening skills. Most use a little English to check understanding or explain grammatical points, but sometimes they use English too much. They plan a well organised sequence of activities, which involve the students actively in their learning. Standards of class management are good, but a few students find it difficult to concentrate sufficiently. Teachers manage students well, and give them a variety of experiences in the classroom. They provide challenging tasks for the higher attainers, and give support to those with learning difficulties. Most students, including the higher attainers and those with learning difficulties, achieve well and make good progress in lessons throughout the school.

81. The quality of teaching ensures that the vast majority of students behave well. They show interest in their work, sustain their concentration, and develop good study skills. Many students show an obvious sense of enjoyment in lessons. They work well in pairs, and sometimes have opportunities to use their initiative in creating role plays and work independently.

82. Leadership and management is excellent. The head of department has developed a very strong team spirit in the teachers, and has organised a wide range of linguistic opportunities for students inside and outside college. Teachers take students on visits to France and Germany and events in England, so that students can use the languages. Teachers cannot use equipment in all lessons because they teach many lessons outside the specialist rooms.

83. Since the school became a language college Spanish and Japanese have been introduced, very good links with local secondary and primary schools have developed, and the college has organised joint teacher training and student events. There has been very good progress since the previous report.

MATHEMATICS

84. Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standards attained by the students in public examinations are well above the national average showing a rate of improvement that is also well above the national average.
- The students learn very well because of very good teaching and because of their very good behaviour and attitudes.
- There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection.

Commentary

85. Students' results in 2003 were well above average both in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE at Year 11. Year 9 results have shown an upward trend above that seen nationally over recent years. GCSE results, too, have improved much faster than those seen nationally. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys compared with that of girls. Given that the students come to the school with average mathematical skills these results show that the students are achieving very well. Their results compared with previous test scores are well above the national rate of increase at both Year 9 and Year 11.

86. The students' work seen in their books and during lessons is well above average and shows very good achievement over time as might be expected from the national test and examination results. In year nine half of the students are approaching or above level 6 and can solve linear equations algebraically and graphically. Even those who find mathematics difficult show the ability to round numbers and approximate. In Years 10 and 11 the higher attaining students solve quadratic equations by completing the square and they handle indices effectively in algebra. The most able students, about one in seven, are studying more advanced work. They can solve cubic equations, carry out long division in algebra and use linear programming to solve problems. All of those seen were clearly capable of gaining a GCSE grade, with most capable of a grade E or better and more than seven in ten in line for a grade higher than C.

87. Students with special educational needs make very good progress, as do their peers including those few for whom English is not the first language of the home. Help from well trained learning support assistants contributes strongly to this progress. Teachers are aware of which students need extra assistance and know their students well so that even when there is no extra support available achievement is usually good. Individual support for students identified as in need of extra help who are not on the special needs register is also very effective. This was observed in the case of two Year 8 students working with a support assistant on sequencing positive and negative numbers during tutorial time.

88. Gifted and talented mathematicians also make very good progress. They benefit from setting arrangements, which keep them fully occupied in lessons. Equally beneficial are schemes of work designed to cover level 8 National Curriculum for Years 7 to 9 and the free standing mathematics qualification in additional mathematics for Years 10 and 11. They are entered for the national mathematics challenge competitions, which they find interesting and in which they perform very well.

89. Teaching is very good across the school. None of the teaching seen during the inspection was unsatisfactory. In most lessons good and better teaching gives rise to secure gains in knowledge and understanding on the part of the students. The teachers are well qualified and know their subject very well. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and delivered at good pace so that the students' interest is maintained. They work productively throughout whether individually or in groups.

Teachers mark the students' work carefully and fully so that students can see what they need to do to improve. Standards of presentation and of behaviour are very high because the teachers insist that they remain so. Relationship between teachers and students are very good and make a significant contribution to the quality of learning. The hallmark of the lessons is that they are effective and efficient. Some are exciting too, but most rely rather more on a didactic approach leavened by a good variety of activities to hold the students' interest. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards often combined with presentations on overhead projectors. The challenge for the department is to continue in their quest to raise the quality of good and workmanlike lessons to that of the best.

90. Mathematics makes a very good contribution to the students' improving computer skills. Good and regular use is made of the school's six networked computer rooms. This ensures that the students can use spreadsheets, databases and the Internet as part of their mathematical studies. They are also taught and encouraged to use graphical calculators.

91. The leadership and management of mathematics are very good. Very good use is made of test and examination data to set targets for teachers to aim at with each class. The students set their own targets focusing on areas of skill and knowledge where they know they need to improve. Teachers are observed teaching and these observations lead to targets for improvement which are effective in helping to raise standards. The head of department, herself a very good teacher, provides a very good role model for both staff and students and leads by example. There is coherence about the department's work which stems from very good departmental organisation, efficient use of meetings and from very effective and continuing staff development.

92. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. No specific issues were referred to at that time as being in need of attention. Over time attainment compared with national standards has risen markedly. Teaching, also, has improved as have the use of assessment and the quality of departmental leadership and management.

Mathematics across the curriculum

93. Students demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are well above the national norm across the range of subjects they study. There is no question of any being denied access to understanding through lack of number skill. In art, although one or two of the lower attainers find perspective difficult most students in year eight cope very well. In history and geography the interpretation of data related to population growth, the rate of flow of rivers and statistics related to immigration and refugees is very good. In design and technology accurate measurement and understanding of scale contributes to the very high quality of the students' workmanship.

94. A good contribution to the students' improving numerical understanding is made in most areas across the curriculum. Each department has a numeracy policy. Effective staff training on various approaches to calculation means that the teachers are able to help students improve their number work with confidence.

SCIENCE

95. Provision in science is **excellent**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A talented specialist provides very good leadership and leads a very cohesive team.
- Students are highly motivated and learn well as a result of very good teaching.
- The department operates very good systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress.
- Teachers have high expectations for learning with very good provision for students of all abilities, all students having their own attainment targets.

- ICT is not used to the maximum advantage to enhance learning.

Commentary

96. In the most recent tests at the end of Year 9, students achieved standards that were well above the national median. These standards were higher than for schools in a similar context. Boys and girls are currently achieving similar standards. In the separate subjects of biology, chemistry and physics, the percentage of students passing GCSE in the higher range (A* - C) is well above the national average. All students who studied the separate sciences achieved a grade in the range A* to G. The percentage of students who studied for a double award in combined science also achieved grades in the higher range and attained well above the national average. All students gained grades A* to G. Students do better in this science in comparison with English and mathematics. From the lessons observed and the analysis of students' work, standards are well above national expectations in all year groups. Over the last four years, there has been a steady improvement on the very good standards reported in the last inspection.

97. Many students start in Year 7 with average attainment in science. By the time they have reached the end of Year 9 their outstanding achievement is reflected in their high level of skills knowledge and understanding. This progress is maintained as students work towards GCSE qualifications at the end of Year 11. Gifted and talented students achieve equally as well as there are many opportunities for them to extend their studies. The small number of students with special educational needs also achieve well because the lessons are planned to meet their needs. All the students are totally engaged in the learning process.

98. The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school. A Year 11 class was taught to an excellent standard when they were learning about the nature of waves. There were lots of visual examples and brilliant explanations designed to capture students' interest and enable them to understand difficult concepts. High expectations and a rich learning experience combined with good attention to the needs of individuals are all-pervasive. The students always work to the very best of their ability. They are highly self-motivated and confident and they clearly enjoy their studies. These qualities and the very good teaching give rise to outstanding learning throughout the school.

99. A talented and experienced specialist leads the subject to an outstanding standard. The teachers work well as a team and the laboratory technicians make a good contribution to the provision for the students' learning.

100. There are excellent procedures for assessing students' attainment, comparing it to National Curriculum levels and their progress is effectively monitored. This contributes to the very successful teaching and learning seen in this subject. The students are fully involved in setting their personal targets for each step in their learning. Their parents are also able to see how they are progressing. The students are taught in sets which allow their studies to be broadly adjusted according to their needs. ICT is not used sufficiently frequently enough to enhance learning. Students do not for example often use a spreadsheet to enter data to plot and compare the results from experiments or a computer to do independent research and to present project work.

101. There has been an improvement in teaching and a steady improvement in the already very good standards since the last inspection. There is now a very good scheme of work and further improvement in the assessment and tracking of students' work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have positive attitudes and work well together.
- Resources have improved since the last inspection.

- Teachers have good relationships with students.
- The use of assessment to track and monitor progress is not yet secure.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is not consistently monitored.
- National Curriculum entitlement is not provided for every student in Year 11

Commentary

103. Standards are in line with national expectations so that students are continuing to meet expected levels by the end of Years 9 and 11. Those students in Years 10 and 11, taking the discrete GCSE course, achieve well. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the other subjects is variable. The allocation of time for the direct teaching of ICT is inadequate Years 7 to 9. The expectation that subject areas supplement ICT provision in these years is not rigorously monitored. For students in Years 10 and 11, apart from those on examination courses, provision is again reliant on different subject areas and this is an unsatisfactory arrangement. The unequal distribution of resources and accommodation constraints has meant that some students do not achieve as well as they should over time. Students make satisfactory progress in the subject.

104. Students are interested in what they do and behaviour is very good. Students have positive attitudes and enjoy the subject. Teaching is satisfactory overall. The needs of those students who find some aspects difficult are met more easily than those who find it easy. Some students are not always given sufficient opportunities to use their initiative as teachers sometimes miss opportunities to involve students more actively in their learning. The national strategy for the development of ICT in Years 7 to 9 is at an early stage of development within the department, so some aspects are not yet embedded. For example starter activities do not involve all students sufficiently. Although most lessons are well structured with teachers explaining what students are expected to learn, the planned practical element is often allocated insufficient time so that lack of pace hinders development. Assessment needs to be more rigorous with more guidance on what students need to do to reach the next attainment level.

105. For students in Years 10 and 11 the school has improved provision to meet the needs of students, providing a mixture of academic and vocational courses. Teachers are assessing well, referring to examination mark schemes and encourage students to assess their own progress.

106. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Instability in staffing and inadequate distribution of time has had an impact on continuity in learning opportunities. The contribution of the use of ICT in other subjects needs to be carefully monitored and developed to ensure full coverage. The school has planned improvement to the allocation of time for direct teaching in ICT in Year 9 to ensure full entitlement. Relationships with students are very good, with committed teachers providing additional support outside lesson time for all students. Provision in ICT has improved recently and overall improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

ICT across the curriculum

107. The use of ICT in other subjects overall is satisfactory, but varies from good to unsatisfactory. The school has focused the development of ICT across the curriculum on a limited range of subject areas, and in these areas, this strategy is working well. There are computer facilities which allow departmental access, but not all areas have subject specific software, and this limits their opportunities. Not all students have regular access to ICT. More opportunities need to be provided so that they improve their understanding of how ICT can be used to support their work in other subjects.

HUMANITIES

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good examination results in the full and short course GCSE
- Very good staffing supports learning.
- Students have a very positive attitude to their learning
- There is insufficient time to fully meet statutory requirements fully in the core lessons in Years 10 and 11
- Work is not consistently adapted to match the range of ability within classes

Commentary

109. In 2003, results gained in the full and short course GCSE examinations are well above the national average. In the short course, 77 per cent of students gained the higher grades of A* to C and 100 per cent gained A* to G grades. In the full course, all of the 23 students entering, gained the higher grades of A* to C. The standard of work seen during the inspection in the examination groups was above average. The students have a good grasp of many aspects of Christianity and other world religions and they can apply this knowledge and understanding to a range of philosophical and ethical issues such as abortion and equality. Their written skills are good as are their thinking skills and their clear verbal responses. Due to the limits on time, the standards of attainment in the core groups are below average. The limited amount of written work has been completed by this large group of students, has very little content drawn from world religions.

110. The standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are above expectations. The students have a good grasp of Christianity and other world religions such as Buddhism and Islam. The students know and understand how things like festivals fit into the overall structure of these religions. The students can use specialist religious language in a meaningful way. Students' written skills are good and they make intelligent verbal responses to many issues brought up in their study.

111. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Students who have special educational needs make good progress due to specialist support in some classes and the general support of the class teacher.

112. Teaching and learning are good, occasionally satisfactory and often very good. All lessons are well prepared and the learning objectives are clearly explained. Imaginative ways of stimulating learning are often used. Most lessons have strong content drawn from a range of world religions but there are some exceptions to this. At times structured and adapted work is not always available for the range of abilities within the class. The students have a very positive attitude to their learning. Occasionally they lose concentration if they have insufficient structured tasks to complete. Active assessment is in place but is less well developed for the core religious education in Years 10 and 11. Good demands are made on the students both in terms of pace and level of work. Consequently the achievement of students is good and often very good. ICT is used in some of the learning. The teaching and learning make a good contribution to the students' literacy and thinking skills, as well as to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Many aspects of citizenship are also brought out through the lessons.

113. The department is well led and managed. Its staffing is very good. The progress on staffing since the last inspection has been very good. No other particular issues were raised. There is insufficient time to fully meet statutory requirements fully in the core classes in Years 10 and 11. Otherwise statutory requirements are being met in all other respects including in the sixth form. The accommodation is good. Resources are good and support good teaching.

Geography

114. Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students achieve well because of good and very good teaching
- GCSE results have been above average but with a falling trend
- Very good leadership and management are refreshing the work of the department
- ICT is not used well enough as a tool for teaching and learning
- Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are not accurately linked to national curriculum levels
- Provision for curriculum enrichment is very good

Commentary

115. In the last three years GCSE results have been above the national average but in 2003 this was below the results for other subjects in the school. The trend has been a steady reduction in the proportion of students gaining A* - C grades. However, a wide range of strategies has already been put in place by the new head of department to halt this decline and there are signs that this is already having a positive effect. Standards of attainment seen during the inspection were above average and students were achieving well. There is no significant gap between the results of girls and boys. By Year 11 students' work shows a clear development of geographical skills and knowledge and the majority can present their work very well. The previous work of a small minority of the lower attaining students showed inability to retain and organise information. In order to give these students a better chance of achieving they now study for entry level certificates

116. End of Year 9 teacher assessments show a steady improvement over the past three years with results in 2002 and 2003 that were well above the national average. However, there is evidence that these levels were not accurately assessed and the work seen during the inspection indicated that standards are actually lower, though still above national expectations. There are no apparent differences overall between girls and boys and both achieve well. Current Year 9 students were being strongly challenged by work on population changes and the forced migrations that lead to large refugee populations. With sensitive, perceptive teaching this work was making a good contribution to the students' moral development, and to their understanding of world citizenship issues. No students at this stage were held back by weaknesses in literacy or numeracy skills. Students showed themselves to be good listeners. They responded well to discussions of opinions in small groups, which were then fed back into wider class discussions and contributed well to social development.

117. Students with special educational needs achieve well. They are mainly provided for by skilled support assistants and extra teacher support, though there was also some use of specially tailored work. Additional challenge is generally provided for gifted and talented students. The very few ethnic minority students that were seen were well integrated into their classes and no students were seen whose level of English acquisition held back their work.

118. Teaching and learning are good across Years 7 to 11 with no unsatisfactory lessons observed, and several that were very good. Without exception, students behaved well and relationships in the classrooms were outstanding. The best lessons were based on very good planning and organisation. Teachers made very good use of the time available by dividing lessons up into sequences of short tasks that made good use of thinking skills and role-play situations. There was a strong emphasis on practical learning; for example, Year 7 students for example were conducting experiments in the school grounds in order to learn about the infiltration rates of rainfall on different surfaces. In the relatively weaker lessons, pacing was too slow and resources were not concisely used, so that students lost concentration. Because there is not enough whole-class access to computers, ICT is not used effectively as a tool for teaching and learning.

119. Very good management by an enthusiastic new head of department has resulted in good improvement since the previous inspection. New schemes of work have followed a thorough review of the curriculum and these are enriched by participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze and Silver awards, and a World Challenge expedition to Zambia. Very good leadership has created an effective team and is clearly already strengthening the contribution of the department to whole-school development. Plans are already afoot for improvement in all areas of comparative weakness so that the department has a very good capacity to improve further in the future.

History

120. Provision in history is **very good**.

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in recent years have been well above average because of good teaching.
- Achievement is generally good; students with special needs achieve as well as their peers because of co-operative planning between teachers and teaching assistants.
- The use of ICT is underdeveloped.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Visits to historical sites develop students' interest and enthusiasm for history by giving a realistic perspective to their knowledge and understanding.

Commentary

121. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with expectations with a substantial minority of above average attainment. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above expectations with a substantial minority well above average. In 2003, the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was well above average. The trend over three years has been upwards with boys often doing better than girls. Although students are confident and articulate, there are weaknesses in written work in terms of incorrect spelling and poor expression, which limits standards for middle and lower attainers, despite the 100 per cent pass rate at A*-G.

122. Taking account of students' average standards on entry achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. In Years 10 and 11 it is very good. This is the result of good learning, the outcome of good teaching combined with students' very positive attitudes and responsible behaviour. Achievement for students with special needs is no different from that of their peers because of the inclusive nature of teaching and very good co-operation between teachers and teaching assistants.

123. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In half of the lessons it is very good or better. Relationships with students are very good and that supports teachers' management by generating an atmosphere of confidence and responsibility. Humour is used well to lighten the mood and to motivate students. Lessons are planned very well to take account of the varying abilities of the students. Some activities are organised very effectively as games. These include analysing and contrasting the evidence of sources on medieval life or acting as a censor during the First World War in 'editing' a letter sent by a front line soldier to his parents. Teachers have high expectations and the activities they set are challenging and briskly paced. The personal and resource support given to them by the teachers and the teaching assistants is very strong and inclusive. Consequently students work hard and sustain a high level of concentration in their lessons. They work very well in collaborative activities. Their work is marked promptly and with helpful comment and corrections to spelling and English expression. Examples of work on the English Civil War written at different levels are displayed in classrooms to guide students. There is a dynamic policy in place within the department to improve students' literacy skills.

124. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers co-operate very well with each other and with the teaching assistants to make lessons effective and productive for all students. Assessment is very good and is used to set targets and to inform planning. Reporting students'

achievements to parents is excellent. Programmes of study are detailed and thorough. Visits to historical sites help to develop students' interest and enthusiasm for history and give a realistic perspective to their knowledge and understanding. The teaching work of the department is monitored and evaluated very effectively. Development plans are focused and prioritised well. The use of ICT to develop students' historical skills is underdeveloped but is a priority in the department's development plan. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good
- Students have very good attitudes to learning
- Standards of attainment are well above national averages at Years 9 and 11
- The design and technology curriculum equips students very well for design by equipping them with very good practical skills
- Standards in sketching and drawing to design are very high
- There is no provision for computer-aided drawing and manufacture

Commentary

126. Results of teacher assessments for Year 9 students in 2003 were well above expectations and have remained at this level over several years. Inspection findings confirm teachers' views of attainment. This represents very good achievement for all students including those with special educational needs since students' standards on entry are broadly average. These standards have been realised through very good planning and through a strong emphasis in Years 7 to 9 on the acquisition of practical skills. These give students the confidence and knowledge to design products well. Higher attaining students have good opportunities to extend the scope of their work.

127. Results at GCSE are well above national averages in all design and technology related subjects. There has been a general improvement over the last three years though results have never been less than above average. Standards in work and in lessons are also well above average and the achievement of all students is very good. In all subjects students' graphical skills are well advanced. They use these skills very well to communicate their design ideas. Their attitudes to learning are very good. Both ICT and graphical skills are used well to present work so layout is often very good.

128. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are very competent practitioners. They are enthusiastic about the work and communicate this well to students. This motivates students and sustains their interest. The good number of students carrying on with design and technology in the sixth form is a sound indicator of the popularity of the subject. Assessment is good and is a strong factor in the good progress made by many students in the final stages of their coursework. Students discuss projects with teachers and between them they set challenging targets. Another important contribution to achievement is the huge amount of time teachers are able to give students over and above lessons – both at lunch and before and after school. A high proportion of Year 11 students regularly turn up at these times. In all activities relationships are exceptionally so lessons proceed purposefully and calmly. This is especially important in a practical subject and in a department that encourages students to work on a very wide range of products some of which are very large.

129. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department is a very good teacher who leads a very good team by example. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. The work of the department is well supported by the technical assistants. There are inadequate facilities for computer aided design and no facilities for computer aided manufacture.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

ART AND DESIGN

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results gained in GCSE examinations are well above average.
- The quality of leadership and management, of the subject, is very good.
- Most students achieve well owing to the good teaching they receive.
- ICT provision and its use are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

131. Students' standards on entry to the school are average. By the end of Year 9, their standards are above average. Most students draw with increasing confidence. They design and develop ideas well for example, when making spectacles with an occupational theme. Their writing skills are above average. They listen well and can recall key technical words accurately.

132. By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is well above average. Most students have very well developed drawing, painting and printmaking skills. Their knowledge and understanding of artist's styles is good because students have access to very good resources including videos. All students have good quality sketchbooks which, they use effectively for the development of ideas. Computers are used less than is normally expected both for presentation and for graphic design.

133. Research using computers is mainly undertaken at home. Over the past three years, GCSE results have been consistently well above the national average with the best results in 2002.

134. Achievement in lessons in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. This is largely as a result of the good demonstrations by the teachers and the visual resources available. As a result Year 7 students learn to understand and appreciate the styles and materials used in different cultures as they study, then render masks using different coloured pencils. Most Year 8 students remember and apply the rules of one-point perspective correctly when designing rooms with an Egyptian theme. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers when learning support is available. However, in a Year 8 class they achieved very little when this support was not present. Currently, too many students fail to recognise the need to apply their minds fully when designing. As a result social chatter is too prevalent during practical activities.

135. Achievement in Years 10 to 11 builds on earlier learning with very good understanding of African and Aboriginal cultures shown in poster designs for an exhibition. Higher achievers are very perceptive when reading works of art. When students understand that a portrait is as much a statement about the artist as it is about the sitter they start to work with a new sense of purpose. Students have very well developed drawing and painting skills. Their written work is well presented, with accurate spelling.

136. Teaching and learning are often good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge, their planning, enthusiasm and high expectations. The open-ended nature of the extension tasks, provided by the teachers, ensures that most students achieve very well in practical tasks. In the best lessons students' needs are fully considered. Occasionally teachers' planning offers curriculum coverage but fails to consider the learners' needs. In a Year 9 lesson for example, the teacher did not encourage students to make notes when they watched a video or discussed ideas with a partner before having to present them in front of the class.

137. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. This is an effective team, including a very efficient technician. At present the curriculum is heavily biased towards two-dimensional work. The storage facilities are poor which has an adverse affect on the scale and amount of three-dimensional work that is possible. ICT provision and use is unsatisfactory with the one new computer not yet in operation. Improvement since the previous report has been good. Challenge for higher attainers is widely evident, standards are higher and the accommodation is better. Display is a strong feature in the art areas but, regrettably, not in the school as a whole.

Drama

138. Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching results in students achieving high standards.
- Students' enthusiasm results in very good achievement.
- The department provides students with a challenging and imaginative scheme of work.
- The subject makes a positive contribution to students' social, moral and cultural development.

Commentary

139. Drama is not offered as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9 though opportunities are given in English lessons for students to engage in role-play activities and to explore the plays they study from a dramatic point of view.

140. Students have therefore only limited knowledge and understanding of drama techniques when they enter Year 10. Students are quickly introduced to a good range of drama strategies with students develop them through imaginative and challenging drama games and improvisations. This together with very good teaching results in students making accelerated progress in the subject. Students achieve well above average standards by the end of Year 11. This was reflected in the well above average GCSE results achieved in 2003, with evidence from lessons indicating that these high standards are being maintained in preparation for the 2004 examination.

141. Students are also introduced to the ideas and working methods of a number of influential drama practitioners. This was observed in Year 10 where students displayed a good understanding of Constantin Stanislavski's concept of 'emotion recall' as they reflected on their childhood experiences and incorporated them into a piece of drama on the theme of 'Memories'. A similar approach was taken in Year 11 as students explored and interpreted interesting extracts from well-known plays.

142. Students usually produce some high quality drama work. They focus on the creation of believable characters through appropriate focus on facial expression, gesture, use of dialect and accent, embodiment of character and the use of space to denote status and interrelationships. The very good progress observed in lessons was very much influenced by the students' very good self-discipline, their enthusiasm for the subject and their ability to really focus on the skills to be developed.

143. The quality of teaching is very good. Excellent teaching was also observed during the period of the inspection. Lessons are extremely well planned, organised and managed. Teachers used some very good resources, including music, poetry and songs, video materials and factual information as a stimulus for learning. Teachers are very secure in their own knowledge and working practices and use these assets to very good effect in the support and advice they give to students. Teachers have high expectations of the whole class and provide them with a challenging range of imaginative drama activities. They give students many chances to evaluate both their own and other's efforts with the intention of improving the quality of their work.

144. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. In the comparative short time she has been in post the head of drama has put into place a very good handbook and a detailed scheme of work.

145. Students regularly visit the theatre to see a range of productions and the school hosts a number of Theatre in Education companies. All students are given the chance to take part in annual musical productions. These are much appreciated by members of the school, parents and the local community.

146. Students have the opportunity to work together in exploring a range of contemporary issues from a dramatic point of view and the chance to read and explore interesting plays from around the world. The subject therefore makes a positive contribution to students' social, cultural and moral development.

147. Drama was not reported on as a discrete subject in the last inspection. It is not possible to make a secure judgment on improvement in standards since then.

MUSIC

148. Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very well qualified, experienced, and devotedly hard-working music staff is a very valuable asset;
- The particularly strong leadership, commitment and vision of the head of department;
- The very detailed planning and delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum for music;
- The considerable opportunities for curriculum enrichment, including the very good work done by visiting instrumental teachers.
- The marked improvements in teaching, learning and achievement contribute to improving standards;
- The significant achievements in extending use of ICT and students' increasing access to it;

Commentary

149. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show standards to be in line with expectations. Work in class confirms this and augurs very well for continuously rising standards in the future. This is especially good given the very low attainment in music upon entry in Year 7. Results in GCSE music are very good, especially given students' previous low levels of attainment. Standards at A-level are very good and prospects for the new music technology course look comparably good.

150. On entry to the school, students' standards of attainment in music are very well below average: often far less than national expectations at the end of Year 2. Standards are average by the end of Year 9, representing very good and largely outstanding achievement. Nevertheless some students still have difficulty with important musical concepts. The majority have greater confidence in singing and playing both as individuals and in larger groups. Students' focus of attention, especially when listening critically and analytically to music, is improving significantly. This contributes well to their improving skills in performing and composing, providing a secure foundation for those who elect to follow GCSE courses. By the end of Year 11, students' musical skills improve further: so standards and achievement are very good. Post 16, small numbers of A-level students sustain those very high standards and achievement while meeting the increased challenges of their courses. The newly established music technology course is attracting more students and currently looks set to reach comparably high standards.

151. Extra-curricular activities of a high standard include a variety of choral, instrumental, pop and rock groups, drawing on the services of the teachers of the Berkshire Young Musicians Trust as well

as the many private teachers to whom students and their families turn. The annual production of a major stage musical has become a feature of the department's work in collaboration with the drama department.

152. Teaching and learning in music throughout the school are never less than good and usually very good. Outstanding features were seen including a 'cello lesson and work in the recording studio. In all year groups, very well qualified teachers and expert musicians have a significant impact upon students' learning, as seen in very detailed planning, preparation and presentation of lessons. Teachers' very high expectations of students' engagement with music in performing, composing and critical listening is characterised by unusual levels of energy and dynamism coupled with sensitivity to the needs of individuals. This engenders very positive attitudes, behaviour and attention to the task in hand by students and students who clearly value their music lessons highly. Lapses in such very high standards are very rare and very well managed by the teachers' well-honed behaviour management skills. Consequently, every lesson observed had positive outcomes, especially in the very high levels of achievement seen. The music staff and students demonstrate their enjoyment of music making and their commitment to the life of the whole school by their involvement in a wide range of instrumental and vocal ensembles. They frequently perform in school concerts and productions and further afield in the local community.

153. The leadership of the department is very good with very clear vision and unusually high levels of commitment and energy. Management is very good. The curriculum is broad, balanced and rich in its cultural and stylistic variety. It is kept under regular review, revised and refined as changing circumstances demand. There are very well sustained plans for improvement informed by very good assessment. The department makes significant contributions to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural education of its students, through a rich variety of music of different styles, periods and cultures. Its work embodies the very good, all-inclusive ethos of the school. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection when provision for music must have had some unsatisfactory features. The very high expectations of teachers are continuing to improve standards rapidly.

154. The lack of sufficient and appropriate access to ICT in Years 7 to 9 means that the department does not yet fully meet the expectations of the National Curriculum. Inadequacies of accommodation and time allocated to music; also give cause for concern.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attainment is above that expected nationally and their achievement is very good.
- Teaching is good and ensures good learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The number and range of extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Indoor specialist accommodation is inadequate and poorly maintained.
- Staffing has not been stable for several years.

Commentary

156. Students enter the school with standards below those expected nationally. By the end of Year 9, students attain high standards in most activities and their achievement is very good. Their analytical and performance skills are above expectations because teachers give students many opportunities to develop these skills in their lessons. Year 8 students have secure basic badminton shots and are able to give accurate feedback to others on how to improve their performance. Year 7 students enter the school with little experience in gymnastics. By Year 9 they work confidently to gain flight from apparatus. The units of work in outdoor and adventurous activities help students to gain knowledge and experience of planning and leadership skills. A few students do not know enough

about health and fitness because this aspect of the curriculum is not always emphasised enough in lessons.

157. Students in Years 10 and 11 attain high standards because they continue to improve their games and movement skills in their core lessons. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have been above average and in 2002 were well above average. Almost half the students in Years 10 and 11 take the full or half GCSE courses. Students produce good quality written work and most have very competent practical expertise. Their standards are at least above average and their achievement is very good. Their games skills as observed in netball, badminton and hockey build well on previous experiences and several students are able to take responsibility for organising good quality practices for their peers. As part of the very good extra-curricular programme, many individual students and teams achieve very high standards in district, county and national competitions. These talented students benefit greatly from the very good opportunities their teachers provide. The achievement of those students with special educational needs matches that of their peers in most cases.

158. The overall good teaching, combined with students' very positive attitudes and very good relationships contributes significantly to the clear progress students make. Teachers give students a good visual image model on which to base their performance. Lessons are well planned and objectives are shared with students at the start. This benefits students' learning and allows teachers to build on previous skills. Teachers frequently promote literacy skills especially in GSCE lessons where subject specific vocabulary is very well emphasised.

159. The head of department provides clear educational direction and very good leadership and management for the subject. He leads by his own very good example in his teaching. However, continual changes of staff over several years have made it difficult to maintain consistency in curriculum planning or raise the overall quality of teaching. Nevertheless, very good improvements have been made since the previous report and the Sportsmark award has been gained. Effective means of assessing and recording students' progress in Years 7 to 9 are well established but students are not sufficiently aware of their levels or the assessment criteria of each activity. The sports hall which is in need of refurbishment is the only specialist indoor area. The school hall is used for gymnastics and dance. Much time is wasted because students have to clean the dirt and litter from the floor after it has been used at lunch and break times and for assemblies.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

160. Provision in citizenship is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has done a lot of work on this provision
- Some aspects of citizenship are well integrated into the tutorial programme.
- In citizenship lessons or units of work on citizenship, students are not always aware that education for citizenship learning is taking place

Commentary

161. At present the teaching and learning of citizenship is done by various means but principally in tutorial periods, where personal, social and health education is also being taught. Aspects of citizenship are also presented through various subjects of the curriculum and through special days or events. Of the work seen during the inspection, the standards of attainment were good. The students have a sound knowledge and understanding of many aspects of citizenship. These include political and economic issues such as fair trade and standing up for one's rights. Students are also developing their skills of enquiry and communication by preparing work to present to the school council. The general attitude and behaviour of students indicates that much of their learning is being put into practice. Several additional activities such as citizenship days supplement the students

learning. Many topics that students study, in the tutorial period and elsewhere, are more directly related to personal, social and health issues. They include sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol awareness, bullying, and smoking. There is more consistency in the quality of this provision so progress here on this since the last inspection has been good. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Students with special educational needs are making good progress.

162. The teaching and learning seen during the inspection is good. Lessons are well prepared and a good range of activities are used to stimulate learning. In some instances it is not clearly indicated to the students that they are learning about citizenship. This is also frequently the case where citizenship is taught through different subjects. The result is that the students' learning is not significantly good and this leaves some uncertainty in their minds. Otherwise strong demands are made on the students so their achievement is good.

163. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The staffing is inadequate for the way the school is delivering citizenship. A scheme of work is available but it has yet to reach its final form. An audit of subjects has been done. Monitoring of what has been audited is in a developmental stage. Procedures for reporting and assessment are already underway.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth forms.

164. In the inspection, 17 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.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	1	100.0	76.4	0.0	24.1	30.0	28.9
Biology	5	20.0	68.9	0	12.5	6.0	22.3
Business Studies	2	100.0	77.0	0.0	16.3	30.0	26.5
Chemistry	1	100.0	73.5	0.0	15.3	20.0	24.8
Design and Technology	3	66.7	72.7	0.0	13.6	13.3	24.3
General Studies	40	97.5	75.5	42.5	18.4	42.0	26.6
Geography	5	100	78.1	20	21.7	34.0	28.3
Information Technology	2	100.0	69.3	50.0	11.4	45.0	22.3
Mathematics	13	38.5	58.8	23.1	15.6	16.9	20.7
Other sciences	5	80.0	74.5	20.0	17.5	26.0	25.8
Other Social Studies	2	100.0	72.0	50.0	17.8	35.0	25.2
Physics	5	60.0	70.5	0	15.9	16.0	23.9
Total	87	79.3	74.7	27.6	18.3	30.7	26.3

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	4	100.0	98.4	25.0	50.9	85.0	87.7
Biology	3	100.0	96.7	33.3	38.4	73.3	78.3
Business Studies	5	100.0	98.3	20.0	33.5	72.0	78.0
Chemistry	8	100.0	97.9	62.5	48.0	92.5	84.6
Drama	1	100.0	99.3	0.0	42.0	80.0	83.9
English literature	12	100.0	99.6	58.3	44.3	91.7	85.3
Design and technology	8	100.0	95.3	62.5	35.5	100.0	76.5
French	4	100.0	98.4	25.0	47.3	85.0	85.0
Design and technology	8	100.0	97.6	62.5	33.1	100.0	76.6
Geography	7	100.0	98.8	28.6	41.3	80.0	82.5
History	8	100.0	99.0	50.0	41.7	90.0	82.8
Information Technology	4	100.0	95.3	0.0	24.0	60.0	68.6
Mathematics	9	100.0	96.1	44.4	55.6	88.9	88.4
Other Sciences	2	100.0	97.1	50.0	39.4	70.0	79.3
Other Social Studies	3	100.0	97.4	33.3	40.1	80.0	80.2
Physics	8	87.5	97.1	37.5	44.9	72.5	82.4
Sports/ PE Studies	1	100.0	98.5	100.0	30.9	120.0	75.7
Total	93	98.9	97.7	45.2	40.8	85.8	81.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

A-level English literature

166. Two A-level lessons were observed during the period of the inspection, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. A scrutiny of students' written work was also carried out.

167. Provision in A-level English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and makes a significant impact on the high standards achieved by students.
- The department provides a very good range of challenging activities.
- Very good working relationships between students and teachers make a significant contribution to their commitment to the subject and their wish to learn.

Commentary

168. Standards of attainment in English upon entry into the A level course are above average, with the majority of students having gained above average grades in their GCSE examinations. Students achieve very well in Years 12 and 13 and make very good progress in their English literature studies. This was reflected in the most recent A-level English literature examinations when students achieved above average grades. Examination results at the end of Year 12, lesson observations and a scrutiny of students written work indicates that the majority of students in Year 13 are on track to achieve well above average grades in their A-level examinations.

169. Students, in Years 12 and 13, display good speaking and listening skills. They articulate their ideas and opinions in a very confident, fluent manner with the more able students making very mature and perceptive comments in response to the good questions asked by teachers. Occasionally, the quieter and less confident members of the class defer too readily to the opinions of their teacher and those of the more confident members of the group.

170. Virtually all students in Years 12 and 13 are good readers, with many of them having high order reading skills. They are very secure in their ability to read for understanding and to de-code the challenging texts given to them as part of their 'A' level studies. Most students appreciate the writers' use of language to convey style, tone, images and concepts and to present implicit ideas and views rather than stating them outright.

171. The majority of students have very good writing skills. The very good knowledge of the texts they have studied enables them to make a strong personal response to the questions asked of them. They sustain a well-reasoned argument by detailed reference to the text, supported by well-selected examples and quotations.

172. The quality of teaching in the two lessons observed was very good. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and convey information to students in an informed and interesting manner. Lessons are extremely well organised and managed. Students regularly take control of their own learning in well-planned and demanding group activities. Students feed back their findings to the rest of group so students learn through the efforts of others. Teachers use a range of teaching and learning styles in order to promote learning effectively.

173. Leadership and management in the subject are very good. The A-level syllabus is interpreted in a challenging manner. Very good assessment systems and one-to-one support ensure that students have a clear understanding of what they have to do to improve the quality of their work.

174. A-level literature was not offered at the time of the last inspection. It is therefore not possible to make a judgement on improvement in standards.

FRENCH

175. The focus of the inspection was on French, but work in German lessons was also sampled. AS-level results were above national standards in 2002 and below average in 2003. A2 results were above average in 2002, but there were no candidates in 2003. One 'AS' and one A2 lesson were observed: one was good and the other was very good.

176. Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well and their current attainment is above average.
- All the teaching is very good since teachers have high expectations.
- Resources are very good, especially those from the Internet.
- Teachers plan well together to give students varied linguistic experiences.

- Some students need to analyse their work more to improve their performance.

Commentary

177. Over the last three years, the numbers of students opting for AS and A2 courses have varied, but have been increasing. Results at AS-level were above the national average in 2001 but below in both 2002 and 2003. A-level results were below average in 2001, but above in 2002 and 2003. The results have equated to the ability of the students. Current students are achieving very well and their attainment is above average.

178. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in the students' files during the inspection showed that they were expected to achieve grades A-D at AS-level and similar grades at A2. Students' French pronunciation and intonation are good. They understand the general meaning of spoken and written French, and pick out important details from what they hear and read. They express their opinions well. They write on different topics using a variety of structures and tenses. Grammatical accuracy varies with the ability of the students, but is generally sound. Students develop a wide range of vocabulary related to the environment, tourism, and other topics. They have good research skills: for downloading current information from the Internet and using the library to good effect. This develops their reading skills and their overall knowledge of French and wider world issues. They prepare a weekly news bulletin in French about current affairs and display it in their French room.

179. The teaching of French in the sixth form is very good. Both the lessons seen were very good. The teacher's expectations are high, and the student achieves very well. Lessons have clear aims that are achieved by the end of them. They are very well planned to both challenge and interest the students and exploit the department's very good resources. In the Year 12 lesson, students were given texts about amusement parks in France and discussed them in pairs before telling the rest of the class their findings. In the Year 13 lesson students listened to a French tape about a child growing up as a part of a religious sect in France. This generated an interesting discussion, which was well led by the teacher. The teacher gave encouragement and help if the student could not understand parts of texts or tapes. If she gave synonyms or explanation in French, the student was quick to confirm understanding. The lessons went at a brisk pace, but the teacher ensured that the students had sufficient time to complete the tasks. These varied activities have helped them to practise and develop their language skills very well.

180. The students have a mature approach to their work and most organise their time well. They write plans before writing essays, and do independent research to consider topics in depth. They have been given good advice on how to develop their skills. They make good notes on grammar points, literary works and the topics, and can use the information to discuss ideas with their teachers. Most try to speak in class, and seek help if they lack vocabulary to make their point. They have good research skills, use dictionaries and other reference material well, and exploit information technology well. They are responsible, and use private study sessions and free time in school to do their work. They show interest in class, and are pleased with their French course. They are achieving very well and making very good progress. They have very good relationships with the teachers.

181. The staff who teach French in the sixth form are very thorough and well organised. They meet weekly, and agree who will deal with which topic. The teachers have good knowledge of the course requirements, and mark work according to the examination criteria. These are in a booklet which is given to the students, so they know how to improve their work. However, some students need to analyse their work more to improve their performance. Teachers use the Internet well to obtain relevant resources for the students.

MATHEMATICS

182. Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching ensures that the students achieve well.
- The students enjoy the challenge of mathematics; their attitudes to their work and their teaching are very positive.

Commentary

183. Students have taken A-level examinations in mathematics since 2000. Results have risen steadily from below the national average in the early years to well above in 2003. The students' performance compared with their previous GCSE results was good in 2003. This reflects improving achievement year on year from a position which was initially unsatisfactory. This improvement has been achieved because the department is well led and managed and the teachers are self-critical and focused on improving standards. As the department's experience of teaching at advanced level has improved, expectations have risen as has the quality of teaching.

184. Recruitment into the sixth form for mathematics is healthy enough to ensure viable numbers and group sizes. This does not fully reflect the fact that two thirds of Year 11 students regularly gain a higher grade GCSE in Year 11 and an increasing number of the most able are studying advanced level work alongside their GCSE mathematics. Students in the sixth form said that they are enjoying the work and the challenge it presents. The department recognises the potential for growth that exists and is again reviewing the sixth form curriculum in order to secure improved results and numbers.

185. The standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with national expectations in Year 13 with the work of students in Year 12 slightly better. In previous years a minority of students have been unsuccessful in their AS level papers at the end of Year 12. Currently this position looks better. Almost all students are on track for good grades in relation to expectations based on their prior performance at GCSE. At A2 level, similarly, there should be no failures and current achievement is good.

186. Teaching is good. Most lessons are carefully prepared and well presented providing the right level of pace and challenge. The teachers are all well qualified. In none of the lessons seen was teaching unsatisfactory. Very good lessons, such as a decision mathematics lesson on matching, involve the students closely in considering what they do or do not understand and make them think and explain. Less successful teaching does not fully address the different ways in which different students think and grow to understand. Some students, for example, are very comfortable with discussing and going over broad ideas orally before starting on exercises. Others need the confidence to be gained by writing detailed explanations to which they can later refer.

187. Assessment arrangements are good. All written work is corrected and checked, largely by the students themselves, so that they have a good understanding of their own strong and weak areas. Teachers support the students' assessment of their own work by regular checking and also by marking all tests and homework themselves. Giving the students model answers to questions after they have attempted them, so that they can compare and contrast their own attempts with elegant and clearly stated exemplars, is very good practice. This occurs in mechanics but is not used across the department as a whole. There has in the past not been enough use made of regular sharp, timed tests marked to examination standards, although it is a regular feature of some of the best teaching seen in the department. This position is now to be remedied.

188. The students feel very well supported by their teachers. They feel free to approach them when they are in difficulties. This is exemplified by the willingness of part-time staff to handle queries and problems by email.

189. At the time of the last inspection the school did not offer advanced level studies so considering the very good outcomes the position is clearly much better now.

Mathematics across the curriculum

190. In general the students' skills in mathematics are very well developed and there was nowhere any evidence to suggest that their academic progress is limited because of difficulty experienced with numerical or graphical concepts. On the contrary, in subjects such as music and psychology the skill levels observed were very good. The school does not offer any course leading to key skills in the use of number. However, because every student is obliged to study GCSE until they have obtained a pass at C grade or better, all are at the equivalent of GNVQ level 2 or more by the time they leave.

SCIENCE

191. This is a modern, challenging course that engages the highly motivated students and leads to outstanding standards and exceptional examination success.

192. Provision in advanced level chemistry is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to outstanding achievement.
- Enthusiastic students are dedicated to their studies.
- Excellent standards in experimental and investigative work are evident.
- Good assessment and monitoring of students' progress occurs.
- ICT is not used fully in monitoring the progress of chemical processes or for the analysis and presentation of data.

Commentary

193. In 2002 the proportion of students gaining A2 passes in the range A – C was well above the national average. All the students passed. This too is better than can be expected nationally. Students achieve the same very good standards in AS-level examinations. These very good standards were confirmed in the lessons observed and the analysis of students' work.

194. Students of all abilities are very well supported as individuals. They clearly enjoy class discussions. They ask challenging questions and they are prepared to explore new concepts and think creatively to get to the truth. They are confident, fully involved and highly motivated. Consequently their achievement is high and they make rapid progress in mastering the advanced academic and investigative skills of this course.

195. The quality of teaching is very good. Highly skilled teachers work well as a team to deliver the subject. In a Year 13 lesson the continued reference to commercial and industrial processes and the every day applications of the benzene derivatives studied, including TNT, brought great interest and relevance which enhanced the quality of learning. The teacher was very skilful in directing the learning so that it referred to previous learning, so as to secure the understanding on which the more challenging concepts were based.

196. Theoretical components of the course are taught well and to a very good standard. The students' practical experience is good. This further challenges their scientific thinking whilst developing their skills of experimental enquiry, data analysis and interpretation. The students work

independently, when required to do so to research their studies. They know that the quality of their learning is very good and they are fully confident that it will enable them to achieve their ambitions.

197. A co-ordinator manages the subject to a very good standard. The school has elected to follow the Salters A level chemistry course. This modern, challenging course brings increased relevance to the subject through topics such as “Medicines by Design” and “Designer Polymers” Two technicians provide excellent support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more sophisticated equipment required for these courses.

198. This subject was not available to students at the last inspection. The department has made a very good effort to provide these high-quality AS and A2-level courses. Currently, two thirds of the students on this popular course are achieving the highest grades A or B, with many choosing to go on to study this subject at university.

Biology

199. Provision in A-Level biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students of all abilities and interests are taught to a good standard.
- Teaching is good because the teachers have good subject knowledge and have high expectations of learning.
- All elements of the biology course are taught with enthusiasm and skill.
- Practical investigations are of a high standard.
- ICT is not used fully in the processing and analysis of data.

Commentary

200. Interested, diligent students are working to standards equating to course requirements. The number of students choosing to study biology is improving along with the higher range of grades achieved in A-level examinations.

201. In 2003, a third of the students gained a pass in the higher range A or B. The proportion of students, gaining A-level grades A or B have been consistently below the national average. There are now more students opting to study this subject at advanced level. An analysis of students’ work and observations of students in the laboratories confirmed that students are now working to standards likely to realise a wider range of attainment with more A or B passes.

202. The achievement of students in Years 12 and 13 is good. Students of all abilities and interests are very well supported as individuals. The coursework and practical experiences are sufficiently challenging and thought-provoking to provide good stimulation for the highest attaining students. The students’ written work shows that they have a good command of all the elements of the course ranging through cell biology, zoology and plant physiology. The students achieve a particularly good standard in their practical work. They show confidence in using the microscope and other advanced equipment for monitoring and analysis. They interpret data from field observations well, showing an in depth understanding of the accuracy and relevance of the information gathered.

203. Teaching is always good. High expectations for learning are prevalent and the teachers are good role models. They teach with an obvious enthusiasm. They have a very good command of the subject and consequently inspire the students to work with insight and diligence. Scientific language is used well. Explanations are clear with many illustrations from the natural world. The students are highly motivated and involved with their studies. They are very attentive and concerned with the quality and accuracy of their work. They work independently in researching their work, when required to do so. They are, however, less inclined to be involved in discussing challenging concepts or in

thinking beyond their immediate course requirements. In practical sessions they work very well together supporting each other in their learning.

204. The subject leader for biology manages the post-16 provision well. The course is planned and delivered to a good standard. It ensures that students with different needs and abilities are fully included and engaged. Their work is assessed regularly so the students can monitor their progress towards their targets. However, ICT is not used enough, either to enhance students' understanding and interpretation of data or to monitor experiments by direct sampling with sensors.

205. This subject was not taught at the time of the last inspection. Since then the department has made a very good effort to provide these good quality AS and A2 level courses.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Communication Technology

206. Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and promotes good learning.
- Standards are improving.
- Learning resources are good and are aiding learning.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good and productive.
- Monitoring and evaluation of students' progress is insufficiently based on systematic analysis of their prior attainment.

Commentary

207. In the sixth form the school is providing a number of ICT related courses. AS and A2 programmes are being followed by students from Years 12 and 13 and the school has recently introduced a vocational A-level course in ICT. All sixth form students have access to an accredited course in ICT.

208. Standards are rising and progress made by students of all abilities is good. Students enjoy their work and are keen to improve their skills. Students are extremely well motivated and enjoy their studies, which creates a good atmosphere for learning.

209. Teaching is occasionally only satisfactory but good overall. Teachers provide good support to individuals in classes where students' attainment reflects a wide range of ability. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, which enables them to advise and guide students effectively. Lessons are generally well planned and resources are well used to demonstrate teaching points. When students were observed working individually the teacher circulated well and advised them on the next stage of learning. Student's response is enthusiastic. They are well motivated and enjoy the work. Student's written work demonstrates satisfactory progress and those in Year 13 demonstrated a level of competence and confidence commensurate with a good understanding of course expectations. Research skills are well developed and students' work demonstrated a good balance between independent learning and response to teachers' support. The work offers plenty of intellectual challenge. Higher attaining students understand, for example, the crucial importance of analysing evidence and being selective of what is relevant to include.

210. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Procedures identified in the course specification are used effectively to inform students about the course requirements. Resources for learning are good and make an effective contribution to learning. Arrangements for assessment and monitoring student standards and progress are satisfactory. .An area for

development is the currently inconsistent use across all areas of ICT courses of informative comments to help students to judge their progress.

HUMANITIES

GEOGRAPHY Post 16

211. Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS-level results are above average
- Good teaching ensures good learning and achievement, and students are developing independent learning skills
- Students' attitudes and interest in their studies are very good
- Very good leadership and management gives students confidence to succeed

Commentary

212. In the sixth form geography currently caters for 16 students on AS level courses and 8 studying for A level. Last year three students did not proceed from AS to A2.

213. Standards overall are average. A-level results have been average, and AS results have been above, though recent groups have been too small for meaningful statistical comparisons to be made. Standards seen during the inspection were average in Year 13 and above average in Year 12, which indicates good achievement for these students. There is no significant difference in the achievements of male and female students. In some years the males do better, in others the females. No students were seen from ethnic minorities or whose first language was not English. The small number of students with special educational needs was being effectively catered for by teacher support.

214. Students are extremely well motivated and are exceptionally positive about the course, which led to a very good atmosphere for learning in all the lessons that were seen. They are developing independent learning skills, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson about global warming, where students were able to bring up-to-date personal knowledge to the debate.

215. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers plan very well, using resources well and generally conducting lessons at a brisk pace. Students are continuously challenged to think for themselves. On one occasion, however, their basic knowledge about world pressure belts was not sufficiently secure for them to clearly visualise the relationship between air pressure and the *el Nino* ocean current. Fieldwork is an integral part of the course and students are well guided in the best techniques for completing their work to a high standard. This year there is an increased and successful focus on the quality of coursework in a bid to gain higher examination grades.

216. The course is very well managed by the enthusiastic head of department who is currently organising a World Challenge expedition to Zambia which will include a number of sixth form geography students. Numbers opting for the subject in the sixth form are increasing and the department is well placed to raise standards in the future.

History

217. Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and contributes strongly to students' personal development.
- Assessment is excellent and shows students very effectively how to improve.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Attending historical conferences in London develops students' understanding of the demands of advanced level work.

Commentary

218. Standards at the end of Year 13 are well above average. In 2003 there was a 100 per cent pass rate at both AS and A2 levels with an average points score well above average. Boys do better than girls at both levels but with numbers too small to be of significance. Achievement is very good and reflects the well above average results attained over the last three years. This is the outcome of very good teaching and very positive student attitudes.

219. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teacher's excellent relationships with students help to develop their self-confidence and to encourage involvement, commitment and active participation. Lessons are conducted in a seminar style that stimulates independent learning and consequently contributes strongly to students' personal development. The extremely well-informed, discursive nature of the teaching motivates students and generates a high level of interest and enthusiasm. As a result, students' attitudes are excellent, their responses are very positive and consequently they make very good progress. Most students are very articulate and they write in a mature style that reflects the quality of their wider reading of historical texts and biographies. Students' written work is assessed very well. Where it is appropriate there is line by-line comment and some re-writing or alternate phrasing is suggested. Critical comment attached to the end of written work is forensic but motivating with effective guidance on how to improve content, structure and presentation. Although some literacy problems emerge in written work, they appear to be eliminated by the end of the course.

220. Leadership and management are excellent. Assessment is excellent and is used to improve students' performance. Reporting its outcomes to parents is also excellent. Annual visits by students to historical conferences extend their interest and enthusiasm for history. They bring students into contact with professional historians and authors and also develops their understanding of the demands of the advanced level examination questions. The teaching work of the department is monitored and evaluated very effectively. Attendance at examination board conferences enables teachers to guide students more effectively towards answering examination questions to their best advantage.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and have been very high for several years
- Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning
- Attitudes are very good, assisting the good learning ethos.
- There is no provision for computer-aided design and manufacture

Commentary

222. In the AS and A2 examinations in 2003 students gained results well above national averages. Results have been consistently high over a period of years.

223. The present sixth form students demonstrate well above average standards of attainment in both the workshop and classroom. Their knowledge and understanding of the areas required by the examination syllabus are very good. Their project work is very good. Their folders are very well presented and feature very high standards in sketching to design general layout and communication of the design process as it develops. Research skills are well developed and there is good use of information from both primary and secondary sources. Students develop very good analytical skills particularly when considering existing products. Practical skills are very good. By Year 13 students are producing outcomes to a very high standard. Achievement throughout the sixth form course is very good.

224. Students' achievement is very good because students take responsibility for their learning. They are keen to progress and make the most of the partnership with teachers, seeking support and advice as and when they need it. They have a high opinion of their teachers. Teachers put in a lot of time over and above requirements. They make themselves readily available for this purpose. They demonstrate very good command of the subject in all aspects of their work. Lessons feature very good pace and challenge with a good mix of activities to engage interest and to motivate. Teaching is very good.

225. Leadership and management of design and technology are excellent. The head of department leads by example and communicates his passion for the subject very well. This has helped to develop a highly effective team that works very well in partnership with students

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and Design

226. Provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The best achievement is found in students' personal investigations.
- The lack of suitable accommodation adversely affects teaching, learning and achievement.
- Standards at AS and A-level are below average.

Commentary

227. Students' standards on entry to the sixth form course are average. Some students have no experience of studying the subject at GCSE level whilst others have gained a high grade. Over the past three years the average points score students attain at AS level has declined. The best results were in 2002 when all students gained a pass grade. At A-level results are below average with few students reaching the higher levels A to B and too many failing to obtain a grade.

228. The best achievement, for all students, is in their personal studies of landscape, architecture, the natural world and the work of famous artists. Here they show satisfactory understanding of what the examinations require of them as they research themes, explore materials and study the work of relevant artists. Students benefit from life classes, at a local college, and from visits to galleries but there is no study visit abroad to widen their experience. Good progress is evident in the development of more personal uses of colour, and of tonal and linear drawing. Current students have used their own time effectively to visit and photograph places of relevance to their investigations such as Hampton Court. Presentation is good and the standard of students' written work is above average. Whilst students use computers for research no evidence is found of them being used for capturing, manipulating or layering images. Further achievement is limited by inadequate accommodation since, for example, teachers sometimes have to share a teaching room with another class. The sixth form teacher and students whisper to one another so as not to disturb the other teacher. This does not encourage rigorous debate or innovative working practices. The lack of space in the department's rooms also limits the scale of work possible so students are forced to work on larger

assignments at home. They do this willingly but suffer from the resultant lack of ongoing advice from teachers. In some cases time management is not strong so students drift behind without teachers being aware of the problem.

229. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and act as exemplary role models for students. Where a suitable room exists for the lesson, teaching and learning are very good, but where it is not, teaching, learning and achievement are merely satisfactory. Assessment information has recently been more actively shared with students and as a result they are clearer about what is expected of them. Year 13 students are still in a remedial situation however, for whilst individuals evaluate their own strengths and areas where they feel they have succeeded, their peers fail to act as critical friends by pointing to areas for development.

230. The quality of leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a clear vision for what is required and evident frustration at not being able to correct the inadequacies of room provision, storage and display space for work in progress. Much has been accomplished in raising students' awareness of the value of the visual arts in the present world of employment. As a result, many students continue into foundation courses. The limitations reported above, adversely affect further progress.

Music

231. Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The current range and variety of A-level music courses offered is very good.
- Standards, achievement, teaching and learning seen are all very good.
- Provision for curriculum enrichment is very good.
- There are well-developed plans to enhance the music accommodation and resources to the particular advantage of sixth form students.
- The considerable potential of the vocational curriculum has not been developed.

Commentary

232. Standards, achievement, teaching and learning are all very good across all the available courses. These comprise A1 and A2 courses in music and a new A1 course in music technology. The creative use of technology in all these courses is particularly strong. Numbers of examination candidates have increased from only six in 2001 to 15 in 2004. The level of attainment is stabilising, representing a very considerable achievement on the part of teachers and students alike. For the teachers, it has been achieved in the brief years since their appointment. For the students, it has been a demanding learning experience compared with their earlier work for GCSE.

233. A wide variety of teaching and learning styles is evident in lessons that concentrate on the essentially practical aspects of music making: composing, performing and critically analytical listening. Teachers and learners study in depth the historical and technical contexts in which both the students' own music and that of others, past and present was created. The subtle admixture of available technology enlivens and informs lessons in which students' work shows increasingly discriminating and refined musical skills. They bring their own expertise and experience to the processes of recording compositions and performances under the expert guidance of teachers who are constantly challenging themselves at the leading edge of modern music technology.

234. The enthusiasm with which A-/AS-level courses have been developed during the past three years bears testimony to the commitment and conviction of both staff and students between whom there is a very positive, collaborative partnership, which is very visible to all. In consequence, the challenges of limited time, accommodation and resources have all been met with resolution to the advantage of all concerned.

235. There has been very significant progress since the last inspection when none of the present provision existed.

DRAMA

236. Provision in A-level drama is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good teaching in the subject and its impact on learning.
- The imaginative and challenging interpretation of the A-level syllabus.
- Students' enthusiasm and their good working relationship with the teachers makes a significant contribution to learning.
- Some students are insecure in their examination technique and the ability to evaluate their own efforts.

Commentary

237. Only one student was entered for A-level drama for each of the years 2002 and 2003. This is the first year that a substantial number of students have entered for the examination.

238. Standards of attainment on entry to the A-level drama course are above average. Most, though not all, students have achieved a higher than average grade in GCSE drama. Students make good progress in the subject over the two years of the course with the result that standards for the current group of students in Year 13 are likewise above average.

239. Most students arrive in Year 12 with a good understanding of various drama techniques and strategies. Students then build on these skills and use them in increasingly demanding activities. Students consider and explore the ideas and working methods of a number of influential figures in the field of drama and world theatre. They use this knowledge in a very effective manner in their own devised drama as well as in the study and interpretation of scripted plays. This was observed in Year 12 as students explored some challenging plays, with students incorporating the ideas of Constantin Stanislavski and Bertholt into their work. This resulted in some high quality work.

240. A similar approach was taken in Year 13 where students used their good knowledge of Antonin Artaud's concept of the Theatre of Cruelty as they approached some demanding scripted work.

241. Students in both years approach their drama activities with real commitment and enthusiasm. They engage in very good collaborative and interactive learning. They listen to and value each other's ideas and opinions, approaching selected scenes from plays from a number of dramatic points of view, before finally arriving at an agreed interpretation. Students create and sustain believable characters over time.

242. Students have good literacy skills and use them to good effect in their written work. Some students are insufficiently secure in their examination techniques. They do not meet the requirement to evaluate their efforts and gauge success or failure of the drama strategies they have used within brief and clearly focused writing activities.

243. The quality of teaching is very good. The teacher who takes all A-level lessons is very secure in her subject knowledge and uses it to good effect to extend students' skills, knowledge and understanding. Lessons are extremely well planned, organised and resourced. Good relationships between teacher and students contribute to very good learning. The teacher's own personal enthusiasm for the work in hand was a significant factor in the brisk, purposeful and motivating working environment observed in lessons.

244. Leadership and management of the subject at A-level are very good. In the comparatively short time she has been in post the head of drama has put into place a good subject handbook and an imaginative, challenging scheme of work. Good assessment and regular self analysis give students a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

245. Students go to see a number of plays that extend their knowledge of drama and theatre. The subject was not offered at A level at the time of the last inspection. It is not therefore possible to make a judgement on improvement since the last report.

Media Studies

246. Provision in A-level media studies is **very good**.

247. Students are entering for A-level media studies for the first time in 2004. Although media forms part of students' GCSE English studies, it is not offered as a discrete subject at GCSE level. Students thus begin their A-level course with a limited understanding of the world of media. They achieve well and make rapid progress in the subject. Year 12 examination results, lesson observations, and analysis of students' written and practical work indicate that the majority of students in Year 13 are on course to achieve well above average grades.

248. Students in Years 12 develop and display a very good understanding of the history and impact of television. They have a good knowledge of its range of services and its ability to inform and entertain. Students also have a good understanding of the technical aspects of television and its means of transmission.

249. Students in Year 13 have a very good understanding of the theory and application of the narrative structure of films. They can identify the key features of films and state how they combine to convey a director's stance or ideas as well as evaluating their impact on a potential audience.

250. The majority of students have good literacy skills and use them to good effect in the research, planning, structuring and evaluation of their practical activities. Students particularly enjoy the practical element of the course and produce some high quality projects. A very good example of this was seen where one student was designing and producing all the advertising materials for an Amnesty International appeal campaign.

251. Another very good example was the production of an original horror/thriller video, which entailed a great deal of personal research. The student in question displayed a very good knowledge of camera technique and used very good on-line editing features to produce a highly satisfying video film.

252. The quality of teaching in the two lessons observed was very good. The two teachers who deliver the course are very secure in their subject knowledge and convey it to students in a very informed, enthusiastic manner. Lessons are brisk and purposeful with a good balance between academic study and practical applications. The very good working relationship between teachers and students and their enthusiasm for the subject make a very positive contribution to learning.

253. The world of media and its interpretation of work and contemporary events make a good contribution to student's personal, social and cultural development.

254. Leadership and management in the subject are very good. In the short time the course has been on offer the head of media studies has put into place a good subject handbook and an imaginative and demanding scheme of work to support teaching of the subject. The two teachers work extremely well together and are highly committed to continued improvement in the subject.

255. Although resources are adequate, accommodation is unsatisfactory. All lessons take place in standard classrooms with no direct access to computers or other technical facilities.

256. The subject was not offered at the time of the last inspection. It is not possible to make a judgement on the comparison of previous and present standards.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical Education

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

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attainment is well above expectations and their achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good since teachers use interesting, varied ways to help students progress.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Students are very positive about the courses and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Students are very well informed about their progress and well advised how to improve.
- There are no computers in the subject base and consequently ICT is too infrequently used.

Commentary

258. In 2002, the one student taking the A level examination, attained an A grade. The results of the eight students taking the AS level examination were well above average. A level results in 2003 showed similarly high attainment levels with about two thirds of students attaining A and B grades. Previous results indicate that students achieve very well in relation to their prior learning. At present only the AS-level course is running. The attainment of the majority of students is well above average and their achievement is very good. Students attain high practical standards in their own specialist sports and have a good knowledge of the theoretical aspects. Their learning is particularly good because teachers give many opportunities for students to discuss with one another and relate the theory to their practical experiences. Students' personal exercise portfolios are well presented and include good evaluative comments.

259. Observation of lessons and the examination of students' work indicates that teaching is very good and that it promotes very good learning. Teachers plan a wide range of activities that interest and challenge students of all abilities. The 70-minute lessons proceed with rapid pace and a sense of purpose. Students' files are marked thoroughly with comments that help students to improve their work. Students have a good understanding of their progress in relation to examination requirements. Students recognise and appreciate the frequent and effective way teachers help them to understand outcomes through their own participation in sport. Homework is used well to give students experience in answering examination questions and to prepare them for new topics. However, the Internet and computer programmes are not used frequently enough in lessons as a means of independent research, because there are no computers in the subject base. Students are extremely positive about physical education, have very good relationships with their teachers and take an active part in the subject.

260. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The A-level courses have been developed since the previous inspection. Analysis of examination results in relation to prior learning is beginning to be effectively used by the department to plan for students' needs. Students report how much they value the courses because they provide an accreditation for example in sports science linked to their proposed careers.

BUSINESS

261. Provision in business studies in the sixth form is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good examination results
- Very good staffing enabling good learning
- Many visits out and contacts with businesses
- Inconsistent provision for the range of abilities in the classes

Commentary

261. Of the students entering for the A-level subsidiary examination in 2003, over three quarters gained the higher grades of A to C. All students gained the grades A to E. Of the 4 students entered for the full course all of them gained the higher grades of A to C. These figures are above the national averages. The standards of attainment seen during the inspection are similarly above average. The students have a good knowledge and understanding of many aspects of business including 'decision trees' and 'capacity utilisation'. They have a well developed range of written work in their folders and they can talk meaningfully about such issues as stock control, and business strategies and tactics. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

262. Teaching and learning are good, and often very good. All lessons are well prepared and a varied and effective range of teaching and learning strategies is used to put across the learning matter. This includes the use of information technology and research work. A significant part of teaching and learning is by students establishing contacts and gaining experience outside of the classroom by visiting actual businesses. Learning is also available through special study events in London. Some students have the opportunity to develop a business strategy for a company not far from the school. These varied experiences help them put the more academic aspects of their learning into practical contexts and enable them to appreciate actual working environments. The teaching makes strong demands on the students so their achievement is good and often very good. Occasionally better adapted provision matched to the range of abilities in the class would enable more and less able students to optimise their achievement. The progress of the students is monitored in detail with regular assessment and the setting of targets. A significant aspect of the teaching is the teachers' very strong subject knowledge. Consequently the topics are taught with confidence so the learning is very good.

263. The work in the sixth form is very well led and managed. The staffing is very good. No issues were identified at the last inspection. The resources are good. The accommodation is very good. Both impact positively on learning.

Psychology

264. Provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching by a specialist teacher raises achievement.
- Clear schemes of work aid progress and increases social inclusion.
- Students enjoy their studies and attend well promoting equality of opportunity.
- Concise assessment clarifies standards and gives students experience of success.
- Access to computers and Internet facilities is excellent
- Students assimilate too little information other than that provided by the teacher.
- Examination results are below average across the grade range.

Commentary

265. Students taking psychology are faced with a new subject on entering Year 12. Students see psychology as something new and exciting to try as they enter a new phase of their education. They commence their work with various levels of GCSE performance but on balance, standards on entry

to the sixth form are average. By the end of Year 12 standards are above average. Female students, who form the majority, achieve higher standards than males because they complete each task as required. As a result of good teaching and the students' enthusiasm for the subject, examination results at the end of Year 12 and Year 13 are close to those expected. Progress is generally good. Students state that psychology is an academic discipline which influences and explores many aspects of human behaviour. They find the work challenging.

266. AS and A2 examination results have been close to those gained in similar schools. Achievement is average overall. Females gain higher grades than most males. Recent results show some improvement for all students. Standards in Year 12 and Year 13 are currently average. The results for 2004 are predicted to be better than recent performances. Psychology is firmly established in the sixth form and its popularity is rising. Students entering Year 12 are taught to think like psychologists and to use the correct scientific terminology in their writing. The higher attaining students work hard in their endeavours and become confident learners. The middle and lower attaining students struggle in some of their writing tasks to produce clear prose. They receive good support which helps them improve their skills. For example, students are assisted with primary and secondary research and with methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and observation. This support provides a crucial understanding of the changing nature of psychology.

267. Teaching and learning are good overall. The teacher knows a good range of psychology. The presentation of facts about complex medical research into human behaviour is clear. A variety of methods are used and these are imaginative encouraging concentration and involvement. The main weakness is the lack of independence. With the exception of the abler students a significant minority of learners are content to be the passive recipients of good quality handouts. The use of electronic sources overcomes this form of underachievement by requiring some individual research. The teacher is doing more than necessary to inform students about psychology. Assessment of the quality of assignments and essays is accurate. Teachers' comments, though sharp, are helpful. These observations develop the techniques of logical thinking, and the skills necessary to analyse and solve problems by applying psychological principles.

268. Learning is good overall. High attaining students are able to elaborate and develop psychology theory and methods by means of example and citation. They are confident in analysing psychology materials, issues, problems and situations. The lower attaining students have a measured ability to communicate relevant material using the correct terminology, taking into account the use of grammar, and spelling, and to organise and present a logical and coherent argument.

269. Leadership and management are good. High standards are set and good support is provided to make them achievable. The performance of students is monitored carefully. Targets are set, and though they are not always achieved, they are successful as benchmarks of what is required to succeed. The subject is developing well over time. The subject leader ensures that lessons are effective and that good learning takes place. Students get regular, effective feedback and appreciate what their present level of attainment is.

Law

270. Provision in law is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The higher attaining students achieve above average standards in writing of legal argument.
- Teaching and learning are good. The interpretation of legal knowledge is accurate.
- Students are increasing their confidence and independence in manipulating legal terms to express their judgements.
- Independent research skills are underdeveloped.
- The use of ICT to support research skills is insufficient.

Commentary

271. Standards of work seen during the inspection were average. These standards are higher in Year 13 than in Year 12 classes. These standards are the result of good teaching. Students are hard working and have positive attitudes to the study of law. This causes the quality of their learning to be good.

272. A-level examination results in 2003 were average. Results over time have been average. Boys out perform girls by a small margin. The predicted grades for 2004 show a similar pattern of achievement. Students' achievements in relation to their average starting points in the sixth form are average or above. Law is a new subject for all the students who choose it. They quickly have to learn new terms and how to reason as a lawyer. In comparison with some other subjects past results have been satisfactory and, in some years, good. The overall performance of students clearly shows progress. The success of students is in part due to their own efforts but it is also attributable to good teaching.

273. Standards have been maintained whilst the number of students studying law has increased. The growing popularity of the subject means that more resources are required to provide the consistent involvement of students in their work which is needed for the study of legal reasoning. For example, discussion, debate and presentations require much greater access to up-to-date legal cases, and more frequent use of electronic sources. The evidence from students' files indicates some inconsistency in their accessing via paper-based and electronic sources the variety of information now available. The amount of independent work they can show is limited by the restricted opportunities to use ICT while in class. Higher attaining students use their detailed knowledge in their writing. The most able students show evidence of wider reading in their written work. The lower attaining students often misquote law cases but the teacher does pick up these errors. For example, students show some confusion between strict and absolute liability. Students, generally, have a positive attitude to their work. A few students do show nervousness in the citation of case law. Notes are taken assiduously. A few students provide their own amendments in response to their teacher's comments about their work.

274. Standards in Year 12 and Year 13 are average. Progress is good. The higher attaining students recognise that law is a dynamic subject. They are able unlike lower attaining students to separate fact from opinion. They grasp the nature of evidence. Girls maintain good files, and they show superior skills in selecting and synthesising information. The majority of students contribute to class discussion and they are unafraid to voice an opinion. There is planned enrichment in legal education through speakers and visits to courts. Students' learning is enriched through these activities. Too many lower attaining students summarise the information given to them by their teacher without undertaking an analysis of their own.

275. Teaching and learning are good in both years. This contributes to the popularity of law. In the best lessons the teaching is imaginative and well paced. The teacher has a good knowledge of the law and a clear grasp of the importance of legal argument. This has a strong influence on students' ability to evaluate the significance of case law. Activities are varied and expectations high. The teacher provides many opportunities for students to speak and to voice their legal reasoning. Good relationships in the classroom enhance learning.

276. The leadership and management of law are good. There is a clear educational direction for the subject. The teacher is a specialist and possesses good knowledge. The progress of students is monitored with appropriate targets set for improvement. The teacher is newly qualified and is starting to be effective in making improvements to the way the subject is taught. Future results are predicted to improve.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Travel and Tourism

Sampled lesson

277. One Year 12 lesson was observed of the Travel and Tourism AVCE course. The teaching was very good. High expectations and challenging tasks engaged the students' interest and led to very good learning and achievement. Students have learned to investigate and discuss their findings in a mature way, and have completed an impressive body of work since the start of the course. As the course has only been running since September 2003, there are at present no school results by which to gauge standards of attainment. However, the standard of work seen in the lesson was above average. This new course is combining well with a range of more traditional A-levels to enabling students to bring a vocational element to their studies. It has strong potential for future development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	2	2
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	1	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		2
Students' achievement	2	2
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	5	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	1	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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