

INSPECTION REPORT

St Bernard's Catholic School

High Wycombe

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110516

Headteacher: Peter Haddon

Lead inspector: Susan Chamberlain

Dates of inspection: 13th - 16th October 2003

Inspection number: 259213

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (selective)
School category: Voluntary aided
Age range of students: 11 to 18
Gender of students: Mixed
Number on roll; 661

School address: Daws Hill Lane
High Wycombe
Post code HP11 1PW

Telephone number: 01494 535196
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body
Name of chair of governors: Mr Mike Moore

Date of previous inspection: 11 May 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Bernard's Catholic School serves the Catholic community of High Wycombe. The school is smaller than other secondary modern schools with 635 students (average 997). The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average at 5.8 per cent. The percentage of students with English as an additional language is higher than the national average at 7.1 per cent. Those with special educational needs, including statements, are above national average at 22.5 per cent. The number of students with statements at 1.3 per cent is below national average. When students enter the school, their achievements are below average, although noticeably lower in recent years.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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2200	Jim Stirrup	Team inspector	English – Drama
19983	Haydn Webb	Team inspector	Science, information and communication technology
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8859	Tom Dodd	Team inspector	Design and technology
20497	Vernon Williams	Team inspector	Geography
12825	Niall Carr	Team inspector	History
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Bernard's is an effective secondary modern school. It has been through a difficult time in recent years but has recovered well. Very good leadership by the headteacher and governors and a good quality of education combined with standards which are above average when compared with those of similar schools results in a school that provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching and Learning are good.
- Leadership by the headteacher and governors are very good.
- Relationships are good.
- Students' achievements in Years 10 and 11 are good and better than in lower school.
- Leadership of the English department is unsatisfactory.
- Leadership and management of the music department are very poor, lacking clear vision and purpose.
- The provision of information and communication technology (I.C.T) in Years 10 and 11 is insufficient.
- Communication with parents could be better.
- Accommodation is, at present, unsatisfactory.

The school is more effective than at the time of the previous inspection. There is still some work to be done on the key issues raised but, overall, the school has made substantial and good improvement under new leadership. Standards of attainment have just about been maintained, particularly when considering the mitigating circumstances that have occurred with staffing problems of a most serious nature. Staffing has now stabilised. Teaching is better overall. There are far fewer unsatisfactory lessons. The school has introduced an effective computerised assessment system. Issues of management and efficiency are under control. An enlarged senior team enables communication and consultation to be more effective. Development planning has greatly improved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	B	A	B	D

*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.*

In 2002 and by the end of Year 9, scores were average when compared with all schools but well above average when more appropriately compared with all secondary modern schools. At this level and against secondary modern schools with similar eligibility for free school meals, scores were above average. By the end of Year 11, scores in GCSE were above average against all schools and well above average against secondary modern schools. Against secondary modern schools with a similar eligibility for free school meals scores were above average. Students' achievement was good in all years in the work seen during the inspection, achievement in Years 10 and 11, although still good, is better than in Years 7 to 9. Overall, standards in the work seen during the inspection were in line with those expected nationally but in music standards are not high enough. .

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good with new school procedures intended to improve these further. Attendance is good and helps students make good progress.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good.

Teaching and learning are good, overall. Unsatisfactory lessons were minimal and mainly occurred in Years 7 and 8. In this school, very good teaching includes clearly identifiable lesson objectives that are shared with students and give a sense of direction and purpose to the lesson. Teachers have high expectations, particularly in ICT. The few unsatisfactory lessons seen were characterised initially by low level disruption and a lack of classroom control as in some music lessons. Overall assessment is good, but it is less so in some departments.

Curriculum provision is satisfactory. The curriculum is well organised and managed, and has good breadth. However, the information and communication technology entitlement is not fully provided in Years 10 and 11 and this is unsatisfactory. The 14 to 19 curriculum gives a flexible, varied and relevant programme for students of all abilities, and enables students to study in local schools and colleges. There is very good preparation for the later stages of education and employment. Curricular provision for students with special educational needs is good and the personal, health, social education (PHSE) programme is effective.

Support and guidance are good in the main school, helping students' personal development and academic progress. There are strong links with the local community and other educational institutions.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and is realising his clear vision for the school. The governance of the school is very good. The governing body is well led and knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Management is mainly effective both at senior and middle levels.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' views of the school are satisfactory. They are concerned about the lack of information on the progress of their children, but are supportive of the school in other ways. However, the school provides good general information to parents. Students enjoy attending this school and feel that they are well supported in their studies, but they criticise the poor accommodation provided.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Leadership of the English department.
- Leadership and management of the music department.
- The provision of ICT for some students in Years 10 and 11.
- Communication with parents.
- Accommodation.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is effective. Students gain reasonable results given their previous achievements and although their results are below average they gain grades more than commensurate with their abilities. Overall students, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress. Students, who do not necessarily speak English at home, achieve satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are good, overall and includes a substantial proportion of very good teaching. The sixth form provides good value for money.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Support and guidance are very good and contribute to the good achievement made by students at this level.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Students' attitudes are very good.
- Links with other institutions generally are very good.
- Group sizes, in some cases, are too small.
- Access to information and communication technology is limited.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good. The overall good teaching in the subject ensures that students develop good critical and analytic skills, and are able to apply them in an effective manner to the texts they study. 'A' level results in the most recent examinations were good and above the national average.
Chemistry	Good. Teaching is always good. It is delivered with academic rigour and care to ensure that students of all abilities achieve their best.
Product Design	Good. In product design students make very good progress and achieve good standards as a result of very good teaching.
Physical education	Good. Students achieve well in relation to their previous attainment. Teachers use their subject expertise very well to promote students' progress.
Computing	Very good. Enthusiastic teaching sets very high expectations. These are realised by highly motivated students achieving above normal course requirements.
Business	Very good. Strong teaching ensures effective learning and consequent good results at GNVQ Intermediate
General education	Other subjects were sampled and provision was found to be good in art and history.

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'.

The school is smaller than average. It has strong links with Wycombe High School where much collaboration at sixth form level takes place. A range of basic courses are

available at St Bernard's but students who want more selection join groups at Wycombe High School. However, for the purpose of this inspection, subjects inspected in full are predominately based and taught at St Bernard's. To gain entry to the sixth form, students must have obtained a score of 45 points or better at GCSE. Class sizes are average.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Very good. Sixth form students are very well cared for. There are very good procedures for introducing them to the sixth form and the different ways of working there. Students receive very good advice on study skills and pursue a course on reasoning skills. They are very well advised on their choice of courses and their progress in their studies. Very good future education and careers advice is provided to help shape their futures.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form is very well supported by a team of highly experienced form tutors. They have developed an effective system for monitoring all aspects of the students' life in the school, and this is already having a positive impact in raising the quality of students' work and students' attendance. The co-operation of the school's sixth form with the sixth form of Wycombe High School has resulted in students being able to choose from a wide range of 'A' level and GNVQ subjects. Co-operation between the two schools continues to develop to the benefit of the students in both schools.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

They like:-

- School tries hard to arrange courses to suit students' wishes. It links with Wycombe High to extend choices.
- Students are given activity and team building courses as part of their induction process
- Students are reviewed regularly and can say what problems they have.
- Students are given study periods and access to the Internet to support their independent learning.
- Students like being in the sixth form.

They'd like to see improved

- Students would like a better common room.
- They would like better computers and printers to support their coursework.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards are average and students' achievement is **good**, overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average when compared with secondary modern schools.
- Students' achieve well.
- Staffing problems have affected standards adversely.
- Standards in music are very low.
- Standards in geography are too low.
- The achievement of a few of the highest attaining students is not monitored sufficiently well.
- Standards for some students in Years 10 and 11 are too low in ICT.
- Sixth form students lack challenge and competition because the groups are often small.

Commentary

1. Buckinghamshire operates a grammar school system and St. Bernard's loses many potentially high attaining students to these. When students enter the school, their achievements are below average, noticeably lower in recent years. However, there are a large number of students who attain around average and less than in many schools who are very low attainers.

Key Stage 3

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in2002

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.5 (36.4)	33.3 (33.0)
Mathematics	34.3 (34.9)	34.7 (34.4)
Science	33.1 (34.0)	34.7 (34.4)

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

2. In 2002 and by the end of Year 9, scores were average when compared with all schools but well above average when more appropriately compared with all secondary modern schools. Against secondary modern schools with similar eligibility for free school meals, scores were above average. In Years 7 to 9, students make very good progress in information and communication technology and good progress in English, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages and physical education. Only in music is progress less than satisfactory. Standards in the work seen during the inspection were in line with those expected nationally, overall. In Years 7 to 9, they are above average in English, science, design and technology, information and communication technology and below average in geography and music. Otherwise they match national expectations.

Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	52.9 (64.9)	49.9 (48.4)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	90.8 (97.9)	90.9 (90.9)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95.0 (99.0)	94.5 (94.6)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	42.4 (45.3)	39.8 (39.00)

There were 86 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. By the end of Year 11, scores in GCSE were above average against all schools and well above average against secondary modern schools. Against secondary modern schools with a similar eligibility for free school meals scores, were above average. Achievement, in Years 10 and 11, is good in all subjects except geography and very poor in music. However, in science and English there is some underachievement by high attainers. In Years 10 and 11, standards are above expectations in science, design and technology, history, business and drama, below expectations in geography, well below in music and in line with expectations in other subjects. Standards are high in the information and communication technology groups but below expectations overall as many students do not receive their full entitlement at this level.

4. Overall, students' achievement was good in all years in the work seen during the inspection. However, although still in the range of good, achievement in Years 10 and 11 was better than in Years 7 to 9. Students mature considerably as they move through the school and with this their dedication to their work improves.

5. The school has been through a difficult time with staffing problems. As a result standards have been affected negatively. However, there is an improving picture and standards, which dipped slightly, are set to rise.

6. Standards in numeracy are about average when students enter the school. In Year 7, students indicate improved levels since the use of the Key Stage 2 strategy in primary schools. Numerical processes are used effectively in science when students draw graphs in line with mathematics department guidelines; they also use consistent methods to measure and work calculators. In technology students learn to construct shapes and perform other geometrical processes correctly and in food lessons measuring is taught according to mathematics procedures. In language students use very effectively counting, telling the time and the use of money under the supervision of mathematics staff.

7. The use of information and communication technology in other subjects could be better. However, good use is made of the laptops and it is used effectively in at least some mathematics lessons and in design and technology.

8. Achievement and standards attained by students with learning needs are average although there are variations within subject areas. Students receive individual assistance either with general in-class support or designated individual support. In some subject areas such as science the more able students are supported helping to raise expectations and therefore achievement. Students with learning difficulties progress as well as can be expected. Students are being suitably tracked by the special educational needs co-ordinator. There are withdrawal groups for special reading support and numeracy. Good progress has been made by many of these students.

9. The achievement of students whose first language is not English is satisfactory. There are about 10 students, who would benefit from further input to their learning although their general progress is satisfactory.

10. There are a few students whose potential has not been sufficiently realised. These exist in top sets and although given sometimes quite challenging extension tasks are not necessarily expected to complete them. They are not sufficiently monitored and could do better.

Sixth Form

11. Students enter the sixth form with standards below those expected. Although they have gained a respectable point score at GCSE this is to some extent gained through a wide breadth of subjects rather than through passes at the highest grades A* and A. They do well to gain the grades they receive at AS and A2 levels. Students' achievements are good overall. They make good progress given their previous attainment. Standards in the work seen are above expectation and indicate a settled and established sixth form. Standards are highest in information and communication technology where they are well above expectations. In English, design and technology, history and business education standards are above those expected; in other subjects inspected in full, standards are in line with national expectations.

12. Where group sizes are too small, standards are affected negatively. Students in these groups work hard and do reasonably well. However, they lack the challenge and competition a larger group would furnish. Many students are successful at St Bernards and this is often facilitated by the schools willingness to arrange individual courses which are sometimes supplemented by attending Wycombe High School. All students have access to key skills in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology. They can use computers to help them with their coursework and, although dissatisfied with their equipment, in the main they are able to progress in the present circumstances.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

13. **Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.** The school makes good provision for the students' moral development. They are encouraged to understand and apply the principles that help them distinguish right from wrong. The school makes satisfactory provision for students' social development by helping them to develop positive relationships and giving them opportunities to take responsibility. Provision for cultural development is less effective because there is insufficient preparation for living in a multi-cultural society. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good. The new school procedures are intended to improve these further. Attendance is good, which helps students make good progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships are very good, which combined with students' enthusiasm provide a very good foundation for learning.
- Attendance is improving and is good. There are very low levels of unauthorised absence.
- There are very good behaviour and attitudes in the Sixth Form.

Commentary

14. The students are helped to develop positive relationships through a range of activities in the school. These include general day trips out as well outward-bound activities. Other trips are arranged by subject departments in the school such as history. The students are encouraged to take responsibility by being school assistants for the day or by being a form or a house captain. Students are actively

involved in the role of support for parents' evenings. An understanding of citizenship comes through the schools curriculum planning for this and the students are involved in the wider community in a range of ways. These include the Young Enterprise programme and students are sent to other schools to support students there in their reading. The students are also involved in raising money for charities and they support a school in Ghana. Trips to places of interest and educational value help the students' cultural development though this aspect of the provision is not a significant strength of the school. These include visits to houses of religious significance as well as to the opera and museums. The youth festival also makes a good input to this. The provision for students to acknowledge and better understand the culture of others is done in a variety of ways. Several world religions are studied in religious education and the school has posters about Black History month. Visitor to the school have recently helped students to understand the situation about asylum seekers. This multi-cultural aspect though is not particularly strong and more could be done in the school both to prepare students for life in a multi-cultural society, and to draw on the multi-cultural heritage that already exists in the school in the form of the different nationalities and cultures represented in the student body.

15. Students are keen to answer questions and contribute their own ideas to lessons. They listen with respect to others' viewpoints and can show pleasure in the achievements of others. Students' very good relationships are exemplified particularly in classes where they work together in twos or larger groups. There is good or very good behaviour in most classes, but both students and parents were critical of the behaviour in some classes and around the school. One in five parents thought that behaviour was in need of improvement. One in six parents reported some bullying of their children, and students also mentioned it. Most reported that once discovered it was quickly corrected. Recent changes in behaviour management, moving from a blame to a praise environment, and bringing bullying into the open by making it everyone's business are beginning to generate improvements. Attendance is improving, aided by the pro-active stance of heads of years. The school has a very low level of unauthorised absence and punctuality is good.

16. Units of work in the personal, social, and health education course make a significant input to students' development as does work in religious education. Topics covered include work on abortion and euthanasia. Sex education is provided in Year 8 and a team comes into school to make students aware of the dangers of drug use. The students are also made aware of the unacceptability of bullying. The staff in the school set good examples. The students have a behaviour code in their planners and there are other behaviour codes in the student handbook. School retreats reinforce this moral dimension as do many topics and themes presented in assembly times. Students new to the school sign up to the behaviour policy before they come and the induction process once they have arrived further strengthens this provision.

17. There is no inconsistency of behaviour of most special educational needs students. The Register is well administered and comprehensive details are circulated to staff.

Sixth Form

18. Students in the sixth form have very responsible attitudes. They take their positions of responsibility seriously and are good role models for the rest of the school. They help readers in the lower school and in the adjacent primary school. They help to manage lunchtimes. They have raised money to help with the refurbishment of their own common room. They choose their own uniform, which they wear with pride. They run the house points system throughout the school. They participate in young enterprise schemes, running their own businesses, and they participate in 'business games' often with considerable success. These examples illustrate that the sixth form flourishes, the students enjoy challenges and make a beneficial impact on school life. The head girl and head boy take a lead in collating sixth form opinion and together represent the school at open evenings and when important visitors arrive. The maturity sixth formers exhibit guarantees that their behaviour is very good.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data:	6.6
National data:	7.8

Unauthorised absence	
School data :	0.2
National data:	1.2

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

Ethnic background of 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	439	19	
White – Irish	14	9	
White – any other White background	46	6	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	18	2	
Mixed – White and Black African	8		
Mixed – White and Asian	6		
Mixed – any other mixed background	17	2	
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	7		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	62	2	
Black or Black British – African	18	2	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	1	
Any other ethnic group	5	1	
Parent/Student preferred not to say	11		

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

19. The quality of education is **good**.

Teaching and learning

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 110 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	33 (30%)	47 (43%)	25 (22%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	0

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

Overall, teaching and learning are **good**.

- Lesson objectives are shared with students and give a sense of purpose.
- Teachers use imaginative teaching strategies to which students' respond enthusiastically.
- Teachers are dedicated and plan their lessons well.
- There are not always sufficient opportunities for students to work independently.
- Work does not always match the needs of the student.
- Students use laptops confidently to aid their learning.
- Teaching of students with learning difficulties is good.
- In a high proportion of lessons in the sixth form teaching is very good.

Commentary

20. Teaching and learning are good, overall and have improved substantially since the previous inspection. Learning matches teaching almost exactly. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than Years 7 to 9. Unsatisfactory lessons are minimal and mainly occur in Years 7 and 8.

21. In this school, very good teaching includes clearly identifiable lesson objectives that are shared with students and give a sense of direction and purpose to the lesson. As in a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher extended students' knowledge of these objectives, and learning was enhanced through the positive attitudes engendered by praise. Teachers have high expectations. As in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, that was conducted at a brisk pace with consequential high level of productivity by students. Exemplified in a Year 11 information and communication technology lesson, very knowledgeable and dedicated whole class teaching combined with well targeted individual help, inspired and informed students who gained confidence as a result. Uses of imaginative teaching strategies increase learning and are most evident in very good lessons. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson, students used laptops confidently, worked in pairs and were extended well. Teachers plan their lessons well. Students respond by gaining the relevant knowledge with relative ease and respecting their teachers, acknowledging their good command of their subject.

22. In several lessons students could be given more opportunities to work independently and also to collaborate. The few unsatisfactory lessons seen were characterised by initial low level disruption, which could become more serious on occasions, creating an unstable environment for learning. In these, little attempt was made to ensure that the work offered matched the individual, most of whom were not confident in their knowledge of the subject so far.

23. The quality of general classroom teaching with regard to students with special education needs is good. The use of learning support assistants is effective. They are involved in planning and preparation and enjoy a true engagement with students. Many of the teaching methods are well designed to use the learning support assistants with good investigative, researching or group work in such areas as art, history and science. The provision in Music is, however, poor.

Sixth Form

24. Teaching in the sixth form is good and in a high proportion of lessons it is very good. Teachers' expectations are high. Students learn well because of the good relationships that exist between them and teachers. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. They can talk beyond the basic facts and thereby provide colour and interest to their lessons. Highly positive learning environments are the norm. Individual help is always available when needed and students are motivated by this. Lessons are designed to be both enjoyable and successful. Brisk starts to lessons, uses of groups and pairs, a business like atmosphere, confident teaching and learning and a good use of questioning contribute to the good learning in the sixth form.

25. Other good learning in the sixth form included the development of good levels of experimental skills in chemistry, the good knowledge and understanding of names, terms, concepts and definitions in history and the use of technical terms in physical education. Students found difficulty in seeing work on forest conservation schemes in the context of study and in comparing and contrasting forest areas. Despite some very good questioning skills in English, some students had problems in responding to and articulating their opinions.

26. On occasions, teaching is outstanding. In a Year 12 lesson on product design, an experienced teacher who related very well to the class, demonstrated how to join pieces of glass. The students were very interested and attentive, concentrating on the skills involved in the teacher's demonstration. Clear emphasis was given to safety features. Very positive attitudes combined with the teacher's important effect on the work rate of students increased interest and involvement.

27. Overall assessment is good, but it needs development in some departments.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a whole school policy on marking, assessment, recording and reporting, which gives good guidance for departments and teachers.
- Most departments have assessment systems which are well organised and teachers give advice to individual students but some departments do not use assessment sufficiently to respond to individual needs.
- In some subjects some students do not understand how they can improve.

Commentary

28. The system for assessment, recording and reporting students' attainment and progress has improved since the previous inspection and is developing 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 whole school marking policy, which gives clear guidance to teachers, and they give advice to individual students. Work should be given National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 and GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11 at least three times per year, and these grades are held centrally in departments and by the school. Students are tracked three times each year. The data is entered on the school system, and this is available to all staff. Some departments also have examples of students' work at different levels. Some departments have better systems than others, but most are good. Assessment in science is excellent, but in music it is poor.

29. There is one evening each year when parents discuss their child's progress with their tutor. If there is a cause for concern, the head of year contacts parents. A full report is issued each year for all students. Reports give details of academic and other progress and set targets for the students, and the information is generally good and helpful to parents. However, the academic targets set for students in a few subjects are not sufficiently precise. Overall, assessment, recording and reporting are good.

30. There is good assessment of students with special educational needs. There is testing on entry and also testing in other years to monitor progress. Students are well tracked both academically and behaviourally.

The curriculum

31. The quality of the curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9 and unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory. The accommodation is poor and resources are unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for students requiring an alternative curriculum is good.
- Provision for students with special educational needs is good.
- The curriculum provides flexible, varied and relevant courses for most students.
- Good partnership links exist with other schools and colleges that broaden opportunities in the 14-19 curriculum range.
- Very good provision made for subsequent education and employment
- Some students do not receive their full statutory entitlement in information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11.
- The provision for music is unsatisfactory.
- Although the school has a building programme underway, accommodation is poor and is affecting standards.
- There are good extension opportunities in the curriculum for the sixth form.

Commentary

32. The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities and activities to meet the interests and aptitudes of most students. It mostly meets statutory requirements except that the ICT entitlement is not available to all students in Year 10 and 11 and this is unsatisfactory. The time available for teaching music in Year 7 is insufficient and the significant loss of instrumental tuition has affected standards and the numbers taking music as an option in Years 10 and 11 and is a principal reason for standards being poor in the subject.

33. The curriculum provides flexible, varied and relevant programmes of study for most students across the attainment range including disaffected and low attaining students. The school offers good off-site provision in Years 10 and 11 for about fifteen low attainers at Amersham and Wycombe College. This is well integrated into their weekly programme and has helped to improve the motivation of these students. Students at the school have less opportunity to study vocational courses than in most schools.

34. Careers education, arranged within the personal, social, health education programme, is taught from Year 9 to 13. It includes extensive preparation and follows up sessions for a very successful work experience programme in Year 10. All students receive at least one careers interview in Year 11 from the Connexions advisor prior to entering the sixth form or leaving for further education or employment. The schools careers education and the specialist advice provided is very good quality. They prepare students for making important decisions about courses, employment and the next step in their lives. Support given by the school in the sixth form for higher education and employment is also of high quality.

35. In order to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties, the school offers equality of opportunity and, in this regard, needs are met.

36. There is no overall school strategy at present for students who have English as an additional language. As such the provision is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless some support in English is provided by means of 'booster' classes. There are no staff in the school who are qualified as teachers of English as an additional language.

37. A number of subjects provide additional activities out of school hours to extend students' learning, including study support sessions. A range of well-attended extra curricular sporting activities is organized, mainly at lunch times. Transport arrangements after school limit the number of sporting activities that take place but a number of exciting inter-school matches are played. Participation in the arts is less developed, due to fewer opportunities, than in most schools. However, there are satisfactory out of school opportunities provided for the enrichment of the curriculum with visits to art galleries, museums, the theatre, opera and trips to places of interest and educational value.

38. Staffing is good. Since the previous inspection, the school has been through serious staffing recruitment problems and these have affected standards negatively. Although there are still some inadequacies, the situation has stabilised and the effect on students minimised.

39. Accommodation is poor and affects standards. Teaching is affected by the lack of facilities for science and design and technology and the poor accommodation for geography, history and mathematics. Poor changing rooms and toilets and a lack of recreational space at break and lunchtimes do not support the high levels of care offered by the staff.

40. Resources are unsatisfactory. Four areas reported shortages which have affected their work in different ways. Access to computers for individual students engaged in research is limited and there are some equipment issues in the design and technology department. Geography and English departments also report some shortcomings. Departments have benefited from major capital expenditure and, overall, the current allocation is satisfactory in the light of the School's current financial situation.

Sixth Form

41. The developing partnership with other schools and colleges is well exemplified in good extension of curriculum opportunities for students in the sixth form. A number of additional subjects such as psychology, sociology, Spanish, mathematics and physics are available at Wycombe High School. These broaden the curriculum offered and develop effective links between the sixth forms of both schools. There is a successful business studies intermediate GNVQ course offered at the school in the sixth form but vocational opportunities are generally underdeveloped. The sixth form curriculum includes in Year 12 three AS subjects and almost all students also take a core programme of "Critical Thinking", which included a religious education element, leading to a fourth AS qualification in Year 13.

Care, guidance and support

42. Students are well cared for; they are provided with good support and guidance for both their personal development and academic success. Students' views are sought and valued well in the sixth form, but less well in the main school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pastoral care is good, based on trusting and caring relationships with teachers, teaching assistants and other adults in the school.
- There are very good arrangements for child protection, welfare and health and safety, the procedures being well embedded but further training is necessary for some adults about child protection.
- There is very good support and advice for the sixth form
- Very good advice is rendered on careers and further education.
- There are good arrangements for the induction of students.

Commentary

43. Teachers talk caringly about students and the difficulties they are might be facing. Health and safety is prominent in the life of the school and safety concerns are swiftly remedied.

44. In the main school, students' progress is reviewed every half term, initially at a staff meeting in October where the performance of every student is reviewed. Further reviews are literally a collation of grades. The outcome of all these reviews is presented to students, but parents only receive the results of the first review. Consultation with students is unstructured and informal.

45. Welfare is well provided for, with special care being taken of those with special medical conditions.

46. Students told inspectors how pleased they are with the way they had been introduced into the school. Students and parents were both impressed with the special service of welcome.

Sixth form

47. Sixth formers are very effectively nurtured by their tutors, with the result that 93 per cent complete the courses that they have chosen. There is an effective induction to the sixth form that emphasises the change in the style of study that is expected of students. They receive training in study skills and creative thinking. Their work is carefully analysed and they receive very good advice on their progress and the attitudes they are showing. They receive very good advice on careers and further education opportunities. When the A level results are available, members of staff take the initiative to find alternative placements for those who do not achieve the grades they wanted, thus ensuring that their students get priority treatment. This is an excellent arrangement for supporting students. All this support is underpinned by the very good relationships between staff and students.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

48. The good links with the community and other educational institutions are not replicated with parents because many of them feel that they are not sufficiently informed about their children's progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good links with the community and other educational institutions in the sixth form.
- Parents do not believe they receive sufficient information about the progress of their children and consequently cannot support them as much as they would like.
- Parents provide good practical support to the school.
- There are good transfer arrangements to the sixth form and very good arrangements for transfer to higher education.
- The governors write a very good annual report.

Commentary

49. Parents assist the school by fund raising through the Parents Association, supporting the Festival of Youth, which also involves a number of primary feeder schools, supporting religious festivals and attending shows. They also help with homework and projects. Information is imparted to parents through newsletters, the prospectus, annual reports [that have levels but few targets], an interim report on progress and parents of children with special educational needs are involved in the review of their individual education plans.

50. The parents concerns about information first arose as the result of a questionnaire sent out by the school. The response has been to try to raise the importance of the students' planners in providing information and to revert to the previous type of consultation in Year 10. Parents have been consulted about a reduced curriculum for some Year 10 students and are due to be consulted about the race equality policy.

51. The links with other educational institutions substantially enrich the curriculum, for instance by providing additional A level courses, by supporting the reduced curriculum for low attainers in Years 10 and 11 and by helping with higher education awareness. The links with the community also enrich programmes of study by providing resources to explore graphic arts, providing locations for GVNQ business studies and the outdoor pursuit course, helping with work experience placements, providing wider experience for drama students, and many other activities. The community is also involved in providing a wider experience for all children, for instance the Pentecostal church provided a number of assemblies for a week.

52. There are positive efforts to communicate with parents with regard to students with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator discusses children's progress with their parents and individual education plans are sent to parents to sign and return

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

53. **The overall quality of leadership and management throughout the school is good.** Leadership by the headteacher is very good, management is good and governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head teacher has provided very good leadership since his appointment three years ago.
- The head teacher and his reorganised senior management team have a clear vision for the school that is beginning to be made manifest.
- Management at departmental level is good or very good, but is unsatisfactory in Music and English.
- The governing body is organised well and has a clear vision of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Commentary

54. At the time of the inspection the headteacher had been in post just over three years. In this relatively short time the school has undergone significant changes in almost all aspects of school life. He has a very clear vision of what St. Bernard's Catholic School seeks to achieve and he has the skills, energy and determination to put in place the measures to ensure the school is successful. He has a very visible presence around the school and is very approachable to students, parents and staff.

55. The school now has a well-structured and expanded senior management team that shares the headteacher's vision for the school, which is beginning to be made manifest. They have achieved a great deal but are aware of what else has to be improved. Consultation is now well developed. Through membership of working parties, pastoral groups and departmental meetings, all staff now have the opportunity to have their views listened to.

56. Performance management is on target, records are thorough, and policies for managing weak teaching and complaints are clear. Considerable effort has been expended to recruit and retain high quality staff, which has resulted in the school being fully staffed for the 2003-20004 academic year. Newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school receive a well organised induction programme which is very successful in helping staff settle into the school.

57. The overall quality of management is good throughout the school. Departmental and pastoral action plans are linked very clearly with the overall school development plan. Heads of department are, for the most part, efficient and effective managers. This is particularly true for science and modern foreign languages. However, management in music and English are unsatisfactory; many important documents are missing, for example schemes of work. Management at all levels has improved greatly since the previous inspection. Teachers commented on the way teamwork within the departments has grown and the way writing teaching schemes and planning activities is now shared.

58. The financial management of the school has been strengthened since the previous inspection, and there is now an effective system in place for making informed decisions about school priorities. The school applies best value for money principles effectively.

59. The overall quality of governance is very good. The governing body serves the school very well. Governors are committed to the school's development and there is a well organised committee structure that ensures that all aspects of the school's life are closely monitored. The governing body is very well led, and has a clear understanding of the strengths and developmental needs of the school.

60. Leadership of special educational needs has had to change due to staff illness. The current staff have shown clear leadership. For example, they have tackled identification of students with needs as a first task with a comprehensive register now in existence. The deployment of learning support assistants is good and their effectiveness is a strength.

61. There has been very good improvement in the quality of leadership since the time of the previous inspection. The head teacher has overseen highly significant changes that have been responsible for an improvement in the ethos of the school and the way school policy decisions are made and implemented.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April [2002] to March [2003]

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1898805
Total expenditure	1918436
Expenditure per student	3089

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	196884-
Balance carried forward to the next	216516-

SIXTH FORM

62. The overall quality of leadership and management of the sixth form are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is now a structured system to both monitor the teaching in the sixth form, and to monitor students' progress which is helping to raise achievement.
- The head of sixth form is very well supported by his sixth form tutors.
- There is a lack of access to information and communication technology facilities.

Commentary

63. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form is very well supported by a team of highly experienced form tutors all of whom ensure that their students are able to

talk through problems and gain academic advice. They have developed an effective system for monitoring all aspects of the students' life in the school, and this is already having a positive impact in raising the quality of students' work and students' attendance.

64. The co-operation of the school's sixth form with the sixth form of Wycombe High School has resulted in students being able to choose from a wide range of 'A' level and GNVQ subjects.

65. Students are very positive about the improved level of support they receive, and are pleased to be consulted on future developments. However, they lack sufficient facilities for ICT. This makes completing coursework and research difficult.

66. A target for sixth form development is to increase the number of students on roll and early indications from the present Year 11 are that this target may be achieved.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

67. The provision for English is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good teaching in the subject.
- Student's good achievement and the standards achieved at fourteen and sixteen.
- The positive attitudes of students and their good working relationships with their teachers.
- The inconsistent and irregular use of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy.
- The lack of a curriculum map and scheme of work to support teachers in the planning, organisation and delivery of the GCSE English syllabus.
- The lack of individual targets for improvement in Years 7 to 9.
- The irregular use of re-drafting skills in order to improve the quality of students' written work in Years 7 to 9.
- Work does not always match the needs and requirements of students in the mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8.

Commentary

68. Overall attainment in English upon entry into Year 7 is average. Students achieve well over time and make good progress with the result that standards by the time students are fourteen are good and above average. This is reflected both in the scrutiny of students' work and the national assessment tasks in 2002. Although standards declined in the most recent assessment tasks in 2003 they are likely to remain above average.

69. Most students, in particular girls, continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11, though overall standards in GCSE examinations in 2002 for both English Language and Literature were below the national average. Girls outperform boys significantly.

70. Good support from class teachers and learning support assistants enables students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language to make sound progress in the subject, though teachers must ensure that work matches their needs and abilities.

71. The majority of students display satisfactory and often good oral skills at fourteen and sixteen, though not all students are good listeners. Some students in Years 7 to 9 are also less confident in voicing and articulating their ideas and opinions when engaged in more formal speaking situations. Regular opportunities are given for students to talk about the work they are involved in, with teachers encouraging students to think in greater depth and speak in more detail. The speaking and listening activities, which form part of the internal assessment of the GCSE Language syllabus in Years 10 and 11, make a positive contribution to students' oral skills.

72. Most students are good readers at fourteen and sixteen, with a number of students displaying high order reading skills. Students are given the chance to read a good range of literature in Years 7 to 9, with students being engaged in silent reading activities during tutorial periods. Although most students have good technical reading skills, some of them are less secure in their reading comprehension skills with the result that they do not always fully understand what they are reading.

73. Students in Years 10 and 11 are provided with the chance to read a challenging range of poems, plays and novels as part of their GCSE studies. Critical and analytical skills are well taught by teachers with the result that many students extend and develop their reading for understanding skills. In contrast some students have problems in the reading of sub-text and appreciating the writers' use of language to convey information on character, setting and tone.

74. Students develop satisfactory range of basic skills in English in Years 7 to 9 and use them to good effect in a range of writing activities which allow them to write for different purposes, in different styles and with a particular audience in mind. Many average and higher attaining students are capable of producing good extended pieces of work with few or no mistakes. Although students in Years 7 to 9 plan their work well, with good writing frames to support lower attaining students, the scrutiny of students' written work indicates that there are too few opportunities for students to re-draft their work in order to improve it. Standards of written work by the time students are fourteen are nevertheless good.

75. The range of writing activities carried out in Years 10 and 11 are somewhat dictated by the demands of the GCSE syllabus and the need to put together a good coursework file. Many students respond to this challenge, though the quality of students final work is very much influenced by the time and effort that students are prepared to invest outside the classrooms situation. Many students, in particular girls, are prepared to re-draft their work over time and are capable of producing good quality work which reflects a strong personal opinion, focuses on relevant evidence from the text, and is supported by appropriate quotations. In contrast a number of students, often boys, write their pieces of work only once, with answers lacking real depth and detail. Standards at fourteen are above average overall.

76. The overall quality of teaching is good with some very good teaching being observed during the period of the inspection. Lessons are well planned, organised and managed. Teachers generally have high expectations of students, with timed targets ensuring that lessons move along in a brisk and purposeful manner. The good working relationship between teachers and their students makes a positive contribution to learning. Teachers, however, do not ensure that work matches the needs of all students in the mixed abilities classes in Years 7 and 8. Examples were observed where students were engaged in the same activity and using the same worksheet immaterial of students' ability or knowledge of the English language. This resulted in some students struggling with the work expected of them or more able students being inappropriately challenged.

Teachers have been ill prepared for the introduction of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy with the result that it is delivered in an inconsistent manner or not at all. This results in students often being unsure of the purpose of the activities they are involved in and the skills to be developed.

77. The Head of English was absent during the period of the inspection. Leadership and management of English are unsatisfactory. An examination of available evidence indicates that the department lacks a range of documentation, including policies and schemes of work to support teachers in the organisation, management and delivery of the subject. The department also lacks appropriate strategies to help reduce the significant gap between the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Year 11. Although the department uses a satisfactory range of assessment procedures, evidence from this practice is not used to provide students in Years 7 to 9 with individual targets for improvement.

78. The well-informed acting Head of English is fully aware of a number of areas of development identified in this report and is taking appropriate action to address them.

79. Standards in the subject have improved since the last inspection.

Drama

80. The provision in Drama is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good and very good teaching in the subject.
- The positive attitudes displayed by students.
- The need to raise standards in students' written work.
- The need for students to develop their evaluative, critical and analytical skills.

Commentary

81. Drama is not taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9. Students arrive in Year 10 with a very limited knowledge of drama skills and techniques. They achieve well over time however students in Years 10 and 11 display skills appropriate to expectations at this point in their studies. Most students are on track to achieve an A* - C grade, with a number of students likely to achieve high grades. Standards are therefore satisfactory.

82. Students develop and extend their drama techniques in Year 11 and apply them to their work in an imaginative manner. This was seen in Year 11 as students worked in pairs and small groups in improvising short scenes linked to *Cyrano de Bergerac*, one of their selected texts for study. Students brought a real sense of commitment to their work and produced some high quality work.

83. Although students develop a sense of audience as they perform their work to each other, they could comment on and evaluate, both their own and other's work. This would not only help them improve the quality of work it would also help to develop their critical and analytical skills.

84. Although a number of more able students are able to write in an effective manner about the activities they have been involved in and the productions they have seen, a number of them tend to describe the process or production, rather than evaluating the individual elements and skills and considering how they combine in order to make an impact on a potential audience.

85. Student's good progress throughout the course is very much influenced by their enthusiasm for the subject and the good working relationship they have with their teachers.

86. Although not drama specialists, teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and convey it to students in an exciting and imaginative manner. The overall quality of teaching is good, with some very good teaching being observed during the period of the inspection. Teachers have high expectations of all students and give them the chance to apply their skills within increasingly demanding drama activities.

87. Leadership and management in the subject are good. The subject is led by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator. In the comparatively short time he has been responsible for the subject, he has introduced a policy for the subject and an imaginative and demanding scheme of work. The subject uses good assessment procedures, including self-evaluation, to monitor students' progress and attainment. The two members of staff who deliver the GCSE course are committed to high standards and raising the profile of the subject within the school.

88. With its focus on collaborative learning and the chance to explore a number of contemporary and universal issues the subject makes a positive contribution to students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

Literacy

89. There is a Literacy and Learning Group to support the development of literacy across the curriculum. All teachers have been involved in internal training to address this issue, with future focus to be reviewed on the development of writing skills. It is expected that all heads of subjects address this issue in department handbooks and subject planning documentation. Although a number of departments consider literacy matters in a positive manner and focus on the development of subject vocabulary and the use of writing frames to support lower attaining students, in others little contribution is made. Overall the school is making a satisfactory contribution to raising standards in literacy, although this aspect of its work needs to be monitored and evaluated in order to judge its success.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

90. Provision in Modern Foreign Languages is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Leadership by head of modern languages is very good.
- Teachers work well as a team, producing good materials for learning.
- Teachers take students on visits to France, so that students can use the language.
- Some teachers need to use the foreign language more in the classroom.
- Students need to check their written work more carefully to avoid basic errors.

Commentary

91. Currently when students enter the school they study French, and can continue with it to the end of Year 11. In Year 9 some students study Spanish: this is the last group to study Spanish as a first foreign language. The department has suffered from staffing difficulties in recent years, and this has had an impact on GCSE results in French and Spanish.

92. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were slightly below national standards in French in 2002. In comparison with national standards, French GCSE results were below in 2002, but they were in line with standards in similar schools in 2002. They were also below most other subjects in the school. However, it is expected that the 2004 GCSE results will be better than the 2002 and 2003 results. Overall performance in the lessons seen showed students' working below national standards in French in Year 9, but in line in Year 11. Year 7 students were able to listen to a tape in French about families and say how many brothers and sisters people had. When speaking French, Year 10 students could describe photos of other students when they were younger, talking about height, eye and hair colour. Year 8 students were able to read and understand information in French about various types of houses and locations. Year 11 students could write an accurate passage in French about a French town.

93. Spanish GCSE results were well below national standards in 2002. GCSE results in Spanish were well below standards in similar schools in 2002. They were also well below most other subjects in the school. Performance in the Spanish lessons seen in Years 9 to 11 showed students working at national standards. Year 11 students could listen to people on tape talking in Spanish, and understand directions to buildings in a town. Year 10 students were able to read information in Spanish about different languages spoken in Spain and write about these languages. After working in pairs in Spanish, students in Year 9 could perform a dialogue for the whole class as a customer and the receptionist in a camp site.

94. In both languages, students are stronger in listening, speaking and reading, and weaker in writing. Overall, there is a satisfactory amount of written exercises and sustained writing in the two languages: however, students make unnecessary errors in grammar and spelling. Students do not check their written work carefully enough: the errors students make in written work are preventing students from achieving higher standards. There are no significant variations between students of different ethnicity or background. Students do not have regular reading sessions, but some read material on computers. Numeracy activities have been incorporated successfully into schemes of work, and are used by teachers. Students have access to computers, enjoy using them, and produce good quality work.

95. The overall quality of teaching in French and Spanish is good both individually and collectively. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in either language. In both languages the quality of teaching is improving standards: students are achieving well and making good progress.

96. In French and Spanish teachers are proficient in the foreign language, have good accents, and project their voices clearly. They use the foreign languages 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 in their learning. Lesson objectives are shared with the students at the beginning of lessons, so that they understand what they are expected to achieve, and checked in plenary sessions at the end so they can assess how successful they have been. Teachers exploit overhead projectors and other resources effectively to increase learning. Standards of discipline are good, but a few students find it difficult to concentrate sufficiently. Time is used well, and teachers are good at encouraging oral work in pairs: this improves listening and speaking skills, and develops confidence in the students. Students' work is assessed regularly, and results inform subsequent teaching. Useful homework, which consolidates learning, is set regularly.

97. The teaching of those with learning difficulties is good, and meets the needs of these students as well. Learning support assistants provide valuable help to students and teachers in the classroom. Teachers manage classes well, and give students a variety of experiences in the classroom, including songs, role plays, videos and class surveys, which extend and consolidate their learning. Teachers ensure that all students make appropriate progress. 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, make good progress in lessons throughout the school.

98. The vast majority of students behave well. They show interest in their work, sustain their concentration, and develop good study skills. Their response is usually good throughout the school. 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 working independently. Their positive attitudes are enabling them to improve their performance. However, a few students find it difficult to concentrate and achieve their potential.

99. The organisation of the curriculum meets statutory requirements. The head of modern languages checks on the progress of students in French and Spanish. The department is very well led and organised, has prioritised development plans, and works well as a team to produce resources for effective learning. Teachers take students on visits to France: this encourages social interaction and personal responsibility, and improves language competence. The text books and other materials used, together with visits abroad, help develop awareness of the diversity and richness of other cultures. The quality of teaching, the attitudes of most students, the visits abroad, and the leadership of the head of modern languages have a positive effect on standards. However, insufficient use of the foreign language by some teachers, lack of resources, and the errors students make in written work are preventing students from achieving higher standards.

100. The department has made good progress on the issues raised in the previous report. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. Access to computers and the provision of classroom assistants have improved. Students are better motivated, their knowledge is more secure, and they are more confident speaking French and Spanish.

MATHEMATICS

101. Provision in mathematics is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average, when compared with other secondary modern schools.
- Teaching and learning are good overall.
- Information and communication technology to support learning is insufficient.
- Use of information and communication technology for assessment records and analysis by all teachers is insufficient.

Commentary

102. Students enter the schools in Year 7 with standards around the national average (recently just below). The intake is truncated because of the local Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools system, which recruits many potential higher attaining students. By ages 14 and 16, students' attainment, overall, is well above average when appropriately compared with other secondary modern schools and above average when compared with secondary modern schools with similar levels of eligibility for free school meals.

103. Students' achievement is satisfactory. They make progress as they move through the school, consolidating numerical processes, expanding their spatial awareness and developing their ability to handle data. Standards seen in lessons are in line with national expectations. Middle attaining Year 8 students recognise and can draw 3-D shapes and Year 9 recognise different straight line graphs. In Year 10, students struggle with negative numbers and Pythagoras. In Year 11, high attainers can use tree diagrams well to solve probability questions but struggle when re-arranging formulae. A very small number of the most able in all years are not necessarily sufficiently stretched although some challenging extension work is available. Their potential may not have been identified.

104. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan the lessons well. They ensure students know the objectives of the task and work a three part lesson, which includes starter, middle and plenary activities. This is, generally, effective but on occasions the starter activity does not relate to the rest of the lesson and can appear to be a distractive addition. Students are generally attentive and show moderate interest in mathematics lessons. They respond well using their individual white boards. Mainly, students learning is enhanced by the respectful relationships they have with each other and their teachers. They are very motivated when they can use computers to help their mathematics. On occasions, students are irritatingly noisy and this can cause a rather fragmented lesson, where the pace drops. Very good lessons are clearly explained, use resources well, such as computers, and are crisp, well-ordered and pitched at the right level. Setting helps students to learn at an appropriate level. Teachers often question students well in a targeted manner, taking account of their level of attainment and, sometimes, their preferred learning style. This strategy could be extended further and is highly effective acknowledging awareness of the needs of the individual.

105. Leadership and Management by the head of department are good and very well supported by the second in the department, who is also the numeracy coordinator. Their clear requirements and dedication make it easy for students to know where they need to improve. The department has made good progress since the last inspection but needs to consider using information and communication

technology more fully as a tool to aid learning and to enhance assessment procedures by computerisation.

Mathematics across the curriculum

106. Numerical applications are used effectively in science with graphs, measures and use of calculators, in technology in the use of construction and other geometry, in food for measurement and in language when telling the time, counting and using money. The use of mathematics in other departments is still at an early stage of development.

SCIENCE

107. Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership
- Good teamwork
- Good teaching
- Very good tracking and monitoring of the students' progress
- Insufficient use of ICT particularly to gather and process data from experimental investigation
- Unsatisfactory accommodation.

Commentary

108. In tests at the end of Year 9, standards are in line with the national average although fewer students achieved the very highest grades. These standards are above the average for schools in a similar context. In GCSE examinations attainment is above average with 100 per cent of students gaining a pass grade. The number of students gaining the higher grades (A* - C) is well above the national average. Students do better in this subject in comparison with the other two core subjects. From the lessons observed and the analysis of students' work, standards are above national expectations in all year groups. This is a good improvement since the last inspection.

109. Many students start in Year 7 with a lower set of skills, knowledge and understanding of science than can be expected. These students achieve well by the end of Year 9. The students' achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11. The achievement of higher attaining students is sound although there is scope for them to do more independent research to further enhance their learning and consequently to achieve more. Boys and girls are achieving similar standards. Students with reading and writing difficulties sometimes under achieve because in some lessons they do not get enough help to record what they have learnt. In all other ways all the students are fully engaged in the learning process.

110. In Year 9, for example, students can work out an order of reactivity for common metals by observing a number of displacement reactions between one metal in its elemental form and a solution of a salt of another metal. They can write a word equation to explain their observations. By the time they are in Year 11 they are able to use calculations to work out, for example, the relative formula mass of common compounds.

111. Overall the quality of teaching is good throughout the school. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. A Year 7 class was taught to a very good standard in a classroom. To compensate for a lack of laboratories the students were given laptop computers to observe virtual chemical reactions of a range of metals in different solutions of salts. The teachers have a good knowledge across all aspects of the subject and they teach with dedication and clarity.

112. An experienced specialist leads the subject to a good standard. The teachers work well as a team and they are committed to improvement through professional development. Two part time laboratory technicians make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the department.

113. There are excellent procedures for assessing the students' standards to National Curriculum levels of attainment and their progress is effectively monitored. This contributes to the successful teaching and learning seen in this subject because 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 and this allows their studies to be broadly adjusted according to their needs. ICT is not used sufficiently to advance students learning. In particular students are not able to see how a computer can be used to monitor an experiment by collecting data directly through sensors. They do not use ICT, for example a spreadsheet, to enter data to plot and compare the results from experiments.

114. There has been an improvement in teaching and consequently an improvement in standards since the last inspection. There is now a good scheme of work and exemplary improvement in the assessment and tracking of students' work. Teaching and learning continue to be adversely affected by the unsatisfactory accommodation.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teamwork
- Very good teaching throughout the school
- Exemplary tracking and monitoring of the students' progress
- Excellent achievement by students at end of Year 9.
- Students who study this subject in Years 10 and 11 achieve well above expectations
- Some students in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their full entitlement.

Commentary

116. As indicated by tests at the end of Year 9 standards are above the national average. In GCSE examinations attainment is well above average for those who take the examination, with 100 per cent of students gaining a pass grade at GCSE. The percentage of students gaining the higher grades (A* - C) is also well above the national average. Students do better in this subject in comparison with most other subjects in the school. These standards are confirmed from the lessons observed and the analysis of students' work. However, not all of the students in Years 10 and 11 are taught this subject. For these, standards do not necessarily progress beyond those achieved in Year 9 and accordingly are unsatisfactory.

117. Many students start in Year 7 with a lower set of skills, knowledge and understanding of ICT than can be expected. Consequently their achievement at the end of Year 9 is outstanding. This progress is maintained where students are working towards GCSE qualifications. Higher attaining students achieve equally as well as there are many opportunities for them to extend their studies. Boys and girls are achieving similar standards. Students with special educational needs also achieve well because the lessons are planned to meet their needs. All students taught in formal lessons are fully engaged in the learning process. There is a popular lunchtime club to provide further experience.

118. The quality of teaching is consistently very good throughout the school. A Year 9 class was taught to a very good standard when they were studying the applications of control technology. The teacher's enthusiasm and encouragement caught the students' attention and they worked to the best of

their abilities. A wide range of teaching resources was used very effectively to support learning. The teachers set high expectations but at the same time pay careful attention to individual students' needs. This leads to very good learning in this subject.

119. An experienced specialist leads the subject to a very good standard and the teachers work well as a team. The facilities are well maintained but it is unlikely that they will be adequate should provision be extended for all students. A technician provides good support in maintaining the network and the laptop computers. These laptops are used very effectively where students cannot get access to the computer rooms. They use the latest technology to connect to the network via a radio link.

120. There are exemplary procedures for assessing the students' standards to national curriculum levels of attainment and every student's progress is very effectively monitored. This contributes to the successful teaching and learning seen in this subject.

121. Since the last inspection there has been a highly commendable improvement in the quality of teaching and learning for Years 7 to 9. This has led to a considerable improvement in the standards of the students' work. Students, including those with special educational needs, in Years 7 to 9 now make good progress. There is now a very good scheme of work and there has been an exemplary improvement in the assessment and tracking of students' work. There have also been substantial improvements in the learning resources, staffing and the leadership and management of the subject. However this does not apply for the group of students in Years 10 to 11 as cited above.

HUMANITIES

Geography

122. Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lower attainers and special educational needs students achieve well and often above expectation.
- Relationships are very good and most students' attitude to work good.
- GCSE fieldwork projects produce effective learning but there is insufficient fieldwork and ICT in Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment is underdeveloped especially the targeting and tracking of achievement.
- Poor accommodation and unsatisfactory resources reduce learning opportunities.

Commentary

123. Results in GCSE examinations, compared with secondary modern schools nationally, have varied being below average in 2002. They improved significantly in 2003. Lower attainers and special educational needs students perform well and most achieve above expectation. However, students do not do as well in geography at GCSE as they do in their other subjects.

124. By the end of Year 9 standards are below the national average but achievement over Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Students have a sound grounding in geographical skills. Most use and interpret maps satisfactorily but the accurate plotting graphically of statistical data is weak. Knowledge of place is satisfactory but there is very limited understanding that similar environments worldwide usually have similar characteristics. Higher attainers are not always stretched enough. Average and lower attainers achieve in line with expectations. SEN students make good progress well provided with specialist support. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Students with white European heritage do better than white UK heritage who in turn do better than black African-Caribbean students. The school is aware of this and is trying to ensure all students' needs are met.

125. By the end of Year 11 standards are just below average. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory for most students but some make good progress. This is due to greater challenge, depth of teaching and higher expectations. Students' attitudes and behaviour remain good but pace of working is too slow. Best independent study GCSE projects show good endeavour and sound standards. However, some students, due to low aspirations, do not produce the work of which they are capable. More revision material and regular testing of students' learning and more students attending after-school support sessions contributed to the better GCSE examination results in 2003.

126. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but sometimes good. Teachers communicate their knowledge well. Management and control is generally good but at times it is not sustained. Lessons are suitably planned and structured although a clearer focus on knowledge, understanding and skills is needed. Relationships are very good and experienced teachers deal well with potentially difficult students through good rapport. Some students have low aspirations and find difficulty in concentrating for long periods without chatting. Best teaching occurs when lessons offer a variety of suitable practical activities geared to students' individual needs. More emphasis needs to be placed on students' understanding of work recently taught by more regular and detailed testing. Learning is limited by insufficient use of local Ordnance Survey maps, local examples and atlases to help students understanding of spatial patterns. Class learning would be improved with regular re-enforcement of teaching points visually on the board and more use of visual aids to consolidate teaching.

127. The subject is satisfactorily led and managed. Staffing is more stable and they work together very well. Assessment is satisfactory but needs more precise tracking of students' achievement and targeting to achieve improvement. Curriculum planning needs more detail in schemes of work. Work in ICT has been curtailed by a lack of a coherent planned programme. Fieldwork undertaken locally around the school and in Wycombe provides most effective learning and greatly stimulates students' interest in the subject. However, overall fieldwork provision in Years 7 to 9 is very inadequate. Resources are unsatisfactory with serious shortfalls in visual equipment, up-to-date atlases, and a fieldwork budget. There is unsatisfactory improvement in the raising of standards since the previous inspection. There is now sound capacity and clear intent to take action on the points raised in this report.

History

128. Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The trend in results since 1999 has been good.
- Students achieve well in comparison with their previous attainment.
- The teaching of history is good. Subject knowledge is a strength. Marking of work is well used to extend students.
- Students are industrious and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Students are not being led sufficiently to independent learning, particularly outside lessons.
- There is insufficient focus on the range of students' differing learning needs in some lessons. A significant minority do not display a sense of enquiry or include their own ideas or judgements in their work.
- The quality of resources adversely influences the quality of some learning experiences particularly group work.

Commentary

129. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average or above. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' achievements, in relation to standards on entry to the

school, are above average. The clear assessment strategies and the positive attitudes of most students also cause the quality of their learning to be good. Students make good progress as they move through the Years 7 to 9 and beyond. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 in lessons, and from studying samples of written work and from interviewing a representative sample of learners, are above average overall.

130. Standards on entry to the school are average. Students in Year 9 are making good progress. They respond to the dynamic nature of modern history teaching and they are able to separate and compare conflicting perspectives on the historians' need to study both change and continuity over a period of time. They maintain good notes and show appropriate study skills in selecting and synthesising information, for example on Henry VIII or Elizabeth I. The processes of good academic research fascinate the higher attainers. Those of middle or lower attainment feel less secure in their grasp of what quality writing means. To help them teachers prepare many excellent examples of good research methods. A greater detail of differentiation in tasks set for the lower attainers remains a requirement to uphold standards in writing. Most students are able to contribute well in class when dealing with oral reports. Oracy is in many cases a stronger skill than writing. Teachers check files to ensure students are consolidating their learning. As not all files are complete this is a difficult task.

131. Students in Years 7 to 9 show good knowledge of chronology which helps them to understand the importance to timelines in relation to the supposition of events and actions of people. Students make effective use of the subject-specific vocabulary they are required to learn. All students are able to make full use of the electronic media to gather relevant and up-to-date data on history. However, access to ICT is often difficult. The process, for a few, is more fascinating than the historical details. The higher attaining students appreciate the clear writing in the quality journals they read and frequently quote them as sources. They use the history reports of the BBC appropriately to support their own writing. Good discussion, argument and writing occur in most classes. Students are given a clear perception of the importance that sound deduction has to the understanding of history. Many students are capable of thinking their way through a problem. The more astute learners quote recent high profile events in the world as history in the making. This provides students with an international perspective thus enhancing the awareness of their being citizens in the UK, Europe or of the world. The higher attainers are as capable of working in groups as they are individually. Coursework assignments encourage such key skills as word processing, internet use and some number work.

132. By the end of Year 9 students are at a standard expected nationally and many are above that standard. Achievement is above average for most students and progress is good. Examination results at GCSE are average overall for a three year period. The most recent results have been above average and reflect value added. Current students are expected to maintain this standard. By the end of Year 11 students have made significant progress and surpass the expectations made of them. In 2003, the proportion of higher grades gained were above average. This is equally true for the grade range A* to G. Over the last three years many students have obtained a good grade and few have failed. The results obtained are in line with students' ability. This represents above average achievement for many students. Girls have out performed boys for the higher grades because they work harder and more consistently. Retention rates are good.

133. The quality of teaching is good in all years. Teaching is inclusive ensuring that all students are challenged and supported effectively and that they are fully involved in the lesson, including high attainers and those with a learning need. There are few exceptions to this ideal. A few students do not like history and lack the motivation to learn. There are good opportunities in most lessons for students to think analytically and show the product of their thoughts. All students received oral and written feedback targeted at improving their writing. A few learners need to show more independence in their work particularly in their homework. Students are expected to show initiative and research facts for themselves. Many do so and their work improves as a result. There is a minority who copy what has already been provided for them. Group work is well structured and it is generally productive. A variety of

tasks are normally introduced so that pace and momentum are maintained. Teachers are able to offer students a good level of support when necessary. As a result of this effective teaching and positive attitudes of most students their learning is good.

134. Leadership and management are good. The teacher in charge of history monitors all the work associated with the subject. A variety of strategies are used to assess the quality of learning and these include classroom observations. Planning is good and it is effective. High expectations are communicated to students. Routines are established which support the development of history.

135. There has been good improvement in the provision of history since the previous inspection. All reported issues have been dealt with. Most students study outside class time. The Internet is used to access modern research. Students are aware of their roles as citizens. The teachers of history are committed to raise even higher the standards reached in the subject.

136. History was sampled in the sixth form. Standards of work seen were above average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' achievements are average and progress is good. The recent examination results in Years 12 and 13 are above average. Students are taught to use a range of sources to find out about the past and they have the ability to organise and communicate their findings.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Quality of teaching
- Leadership and management
- Further developments in ICT (especially CAD/CAM)
- Closer monitoring of project work in Years 10 and 11
- Maintenance and upgrading of equipment

Commentary

138. In the GCSE examinations this year students gained higher grades (A* - C) in resistant materials (19 per cent), graphics (21 per cent) and in food studies (69 per cent), which is well above the national average. Results in the Product Design 'A' level examination are commendable and students made good progress.

139. Attainment in lessons is sound and students respond well to the structured approach to design work. In Years 7 to 9 they experience a range of tasks and assignments through which they build up a bank of key skills both in designing and making. The evidence of work in folders indicates good progress throughout the year and records the developing understanding of design project work. This sound groundwork prepares them for the more open-ended work in GCSE courses. Important issues like hygiene, health and safety, risk assessment and codes of behaviour are also introduced. Students' records are stored centrally and are used in review meetings and interviews with the individual to guide future learning.

140. The GCSE design folders are of a very good standard and they reflect a range of graphics and illustrative techniques. Students introduce their skills in ICT, both as part of the important planning process but also to enhance the presentation of their work. There is evidence of developing personal style and innovative response. Students develop their ideas through research and analysis of different design contexts. The presentational quality of design folders is good and students take great care with

them. Students in food studies preserve an important record of their work throughout the course in their folders. Displays illustrate the wide range of practical work produced and the quality which students are achieving.

141. The behaviour of students during the inspection has been good and their attitudes towards study have been positive. Health and safety matters are given high profile and students observe the standards set in specialist rooms and workshops. Relationships are very good and students are able to collaborate easily and work in groups. Those with special educational needs make good progress, they are clearly identified and staff are aware of important personal targets and needs.

142. The teaching team has experienced a number of changes and recently has had to cover for colleagues on long term sick leave. Staff work hard and have cooperated in introducing much change since the last inspection. Teachers have developed a range of resources to provide structure to programmes and to help improve the quality of the work. The team is well supported by two experienced and competent technicians. Many improvements are due to the staff's ability to work as a team and to provide extra support to each other. The quality of teaching during the inspection was very good and there were many examples of excellent practice.

143. Leadership and management are good and contribute to higher standards; documentation is full and detailed. Already much has been done to bring about change but lack of a stable staff and a shortage of financial resources have made the task more difficult. New food studies accommodation is of a good standard but the workshop and graphics facilities are in need of refurbishment and upgrading. Further development of ICT is necessary, especially in the areas of computer aided design or manufacturing. Overall, resources need improving to enable further upgrading and maintenance of equipment.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new management of the art department is promoting students' good achievement.
- There is good medium term, daily planning and review
- Very good use of sketchbooks and a focus on the development of an art vocabulary
- Achievement at GCSE which is low
- Ineffective time management and lack of a plenary session in some lessons
- The furniture for storage and resources for teaching pottery are unsatisfactory

Commentary

145. Over the past three years standards in GCSE have improved slightly but are currently below national standards. Students do not achieve as well in art as in the majority of their other subjects. In Year 11 the variety of work on display demonstrates that students have experienced a broad curriculum. However, past work in Years 10 and 11 has lacked continuity. Composition and representation is immature and work does not show consistency and depth. In Year 10 the numbers of students opting to take GCSE has doubled this year, indicating a revived interest in the subject. They talk knowledgeably about other artists and genres and are confident to formulate opinions. One group of students discussed their preference between Van Gogh and Damien Hirst, considering if both could be seen as 'modern' artists.

146. Most students enter the school able to draw and paint competently. They describe how to select harmonious colours, experiment with wax resistant techniques and mono prints. In Year 8 papier-mache

sculptures are carefully prepared by students who invent original designs based on Dennis Kythe's 'Botanical Footwear.' By the end of Year 9 progress is consistent but slow and achievement is below other schools nationally. The recent introduction of sketchbooks and a specific art vocabulary establishes an effective process for review. Students use their sketchbooks well to experiment, discuss their intentions and form opinions about their work. They are marked consistently and positively but the use of evaluative comments and suggestions for improvement is less well developed.

147. Teaching and learning are satisfactory since the new appointments have been made. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the curriculum and good planning is in place. Efficient use of medium term plans ensures the flexibility to evaluate current progress and inform development of the art curriculum. Lessons are interesting and lively. Delightful paintings in bright colours improve observation skills by enlarging sections of petals and flowers. Teaching is weaker when lesson endings are disorganised and there is no time allocated for students to evaluate and reflect on what has been learned. Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The development of a questionnaire to ascertain students' prior knowledge on entry to the school currently establishes a clear baseline. Examination procedures inform assessment well at end of Year 11 and comments are informative. All students know what they have achieved. They are less certain how they could improve their work. Careful differentiation for students with special educational needs is relevant to their specific needs. Teaching builds confidence by focusing on strengths. Most students listen well and demonstrate both enjoyment and pride in their work. A minority who seek attention by challenging the teacher are well managed with a firm insistence on the observation of class and school rules. Teachers offer strong but friendly role models encouraging awareness of social and moral responsibilities. The spiritual aspects of art are included informally. Very good links are made with the work of other artists but the art of other cultures is not yet fully developed as a facet of the curriculum.

148. The management of the art department changed recently and is effecting positive change. Although change is rapid at present, since the last inspection there has been little improvement and some deterioration. The environment is tired and furniture for storage is dilapidated. There is no kiln and the sorting and clearing of past work, while being organized with care, prevents all surfaces from being used effectively. .

149. The Head of Art post is shared enthusiastically by two newly qualified teachers who have already established a thriving department. During the inspection they had been in post for six weeks. They experience very supportive mentoring in school and there are plans for them to liaise with an experienced Head of Art in another school. Very good links are established with the Art Adviser who has established NQT support groups.

Sixth Form

150. Small numbers of students take art to an advanced level and past standards have been low but in 2003 results were better. Students are well motivated and articulate, one student uses a free period to continue developing her art-work setting a good example for younger students. Courses support other subjects. A student in Year 13 works on a pollution project, which links well with geography. All students aspire to further education at University or Colleges of Art. They make visits and support their opinions with interest and enthusiasm comparing current exhibitions at the Tate Modern, Tate Britain and the Royal Academy.

Music

151. Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The unsatisfactory quality of teaching and learning has led to very poor results in GCSE.

- The good quality of instrumental tuition has sustained the music department in difficult times although numbers receiving tuition are currently halved.
- Leadership and management in the department are very poor, lacking clear vision and purpose.
- The music curriculum has not been kept up to date and lacks breadth, balance and depth.
- Extra-curricular provision is poor, relying on the strengths of individual students.

Commentary

152. Very poor results in GCSE in 2003 continue a downward trend. Given students' prior levels of attainment in music, these achievements are very poor. At A-level a single candidate's result was below national averages. However, it still represents good achievement. Several students learning to play instruments take graded examinations in music but their results are not logged by the department and therefore not recorded in the governors' report to parents.

153. On entry to the school, students' standards of attainment in music are poor: often far less than national expectations at Key Stage 2 and below even those standards expected by the end of Key Stage 1. Standards and achievement improve marginally but remain well below by the end of Year 9. However, some students, especially those receiving instrumental tuition within or outside school have greater confidence in singing and playing both as individuals and in groups. The focus of some individual students' attention, especially when performing and listening to music, is very good, e.g. the Year 9 boy who has already gained distinction in a recent graded music examination. There is no GCSE course in Year 10. The standards attained in GCSE music were very poor and the current group of Year 11 music candidates are predicted to do little better.

154. Teaching and learning in music is characterised by sharp contrasts: the quality of instrumental tuition is very good but in National Curriculum classes in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE course in Year 11 (there is no Year 10 music course) it is, respectively unsatisfactory and poor. The visiting instrumental teaching staff provides a good service to the school. Their students demonstrate their enjoyment of music making and their commitment to the life of the whole school by their involvement in a range of instrumental ensembles, performing in school concerts and further a-field in the local community. Several students are involved in activities at the High Wycombe Music Centre. The curriculum is insufficiently broad and does not give students the various experiences it could.

155. The department lacks secure leadership at this time. The personal vision, convictions and commitment of the more recently appointed head teacher have encouraged the school governors to support music with refurbishment of the existing first-floor accommodation and its resources, providing new accommodation within the building now under construction. This provision will be good, affording more space for class music teaching and the lost instrumental tuition, which the head teacher is in process of recovering. This evident commitment, together with the ambitions of the head teacher, augurs well for the future of music in the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a team of committed and enthusiastic staff who have good subject knowledge and teach well.
- Students' good attitude in lessons contributes to the progress they make.
- Schemes of work need to be updated.
- Raise the standards in GCSE physical education.
- The leadership of the department is good.

157. Students' standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are in line with those seen nationally. This represents good achievement by students who very frequently bring with them from their primary school very limited experiences of physical education. This good progress is continued during Years 10 and 11, and by the time they are 16 years old most students are reaching standards that are in line with the national average, and a significant number of students are doing even better. In the July 2002 GCSE examination the number of students gaining the A*-C grade passes was below the national average. Students with special education needs make good progress, and there is no evidence of students with special needs being disadvantaged by the curriculum offered.

158. The overall good achievement of students is directly attributable to good teaching. Students respond well to challenging expectations, good pace and the effective use of resources. In lessons aims are made clear, content is appropriate to the students needs and abilities. There is an expectation that students will work hard, behave well and produce a standard of work of which they are capable, and generally these expectations are met.

159. Students respond very positively to this good teaching and involved themselves in lessons with enthusiasm and commitment. Their enjoyment of their lessons is very evident.

160. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department who was appointed less than two years ago has overseen a complete change of staff and curriculum within this time. He provides a very good role model for the department. Hard working teachers work together as a team, sharing a commitment to the improvement of the department and being very supportive of each other. The schemes of work are being updated, and it is now essential that these are completed and used to influence curriculum planning.

161. Good progress has been made by the department during the last two years. The newly appointed head of department has enabled the specialist staff, who have all been recently appointed, to become a highly effective departmental team that is serving the needs of the students very well.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

162. Provision for Business Studies is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good quality of the teaching is a significant element of the provision
- The results on the Intermediate GNVQ course are good
- The demands made on the students are high
- More structured work better suited to the range of abilities in the class and to help with the students concentration
- More computers are needed to help with the learning

Commentary

163. Standard of attainment in the Intermediate GNVQ is above average though because of small numbers the results need to be viewed with caution. The standard of attainment of the current students is also largely above average. The students have a good amount of written work in their folders and they are competent in doing research work for their assignments. The students can think through many of the issues brought up in the classroom and can give good verbal responses though they need some encouragement to do this. The overall achievement of the students is good as the teaching is demanding. The progress of students with special educational needs or who have English as an additional language is satisfactory. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

164. Teaching is good overall and often very good. All lessons are well planned and a good range of activities are used to put across the subject matter in an effective way. The demands made on the students are high and so a lot of learning is done in the time available. Where the teaching is very good, control of the lessons is firm and so the students work in a consistent way and the learning objectives of the lessons are clear to the students themselves. Where the teaching is satisfactory, the learning is less significant due to some students finding it difficult to concentrate on their work. Firmer control and more structured differentiated work would help this, as would simpler graded tasks designed to reach the same overall lesson objective. More monitoring of the teaching across the department would also benefit this. Otherwise and across the teaching generally, subject expertise and teaching is strong and the topics are presented with confidence. Information and communication technology is used in the teaching where possible and there is good input to literacy. Homework is set and marking and assessment are both detailed and effective.

165. The leadership and management are good. The staffing is skilled and knowledgeable. The resources are satisfactory overall but there is a shortage of computers for classroom use. The accommodation is satisfactory but cramped for the number of students that use the room.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

166. Provision for personal, social and health education is **good**.

167. All students, including those in the Sixth form have a period of time set aside each week where they study a number topics designed to educate them about a range of issues that they will have to confront as they grow up. These issues include sex education and drugs education. In addition to the specific PSHE lesson, a significant amount of curriculum time is given over to the teaching of religious education. Very many topics covered in this subject include moral and social issues and in general it makes a very significant contribution to this aspect of the students learning. Examples of these are marriage and abortion and the general topic of respect. Visitors to the school such as the police also make good contribution to the students moral, social and health development. Other work includes the students learning about health and safety issues, values and consequences, and the setting of targets. Units of work on bullying are in the process of further development.

Citizenship

168. Overall the provision for citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An audit has been carried out which identifies where citizenship is being taught across the subject off the curriculum
- The week of cross-curricular work makes an important contribution to citizenship
- Work in religious education and the personal, social and health education programme also make an important contribution to citizenship
- The aspect of political literacy is not strong

Commentary

169. Citizenship is not taught as a discrete subject in the school but through other subjects of the curriculum. The significant emphasis which the school has on the teaching of religious education means that many aspects of citizenship are covered in this subject area. These aspects include analysing information about topical spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Topics covered include law and order and capital punishment. The personal, social and health education programme also makes a

significant input to citizenship. Pupils study aspects of prejudice and discrimination and other topical subjects like euthanasia. Values and consequences are also part of the programme. The general ethos of the school and values which it stands for also make a strong contribution to citizenship. These are not always obvious or systematically incorporated into the life of the school but nonetheless they have a strong presence and play an important part in preparing its pupils to be good citizens. The skills aspects of citizenship are developed in various ways. Pupils can participate in school and community based activities, such as in the mentoring programme. Pupils in some years have participated in democratic mock-elections. The cross-curricular week that the school arranges is also used to further the pupils learning about citizenship. The aspect of political literacy is not strong but steps are already underway to strengthen further this aspect. The teaching staff have had a training workshop in citizenship and this has been reinforced in various ways since then. The school is moving towards a developed programme of monitoring and evaluation in citizenship, and record books are already available. Subject areas across the school are planning to mark their own work with a citizenship angle in mind.

170. As citizenship is taught through many subject areas at different times, no direct observation of the teaching of citizenship was done during the time of the inspection so no statements can be made about the quality of teaching and learning. However, from looking at pupils books and in conversations with them it is clear that the standards of attainment are at least average and in line with what would be expected at this stage. Achievement is satisfactory. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils who have special educational needs and who have English as an additional language are making satisfactory progress.

171. The leadership and management are good. The accommodation and resources are good.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

172. Six subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in history and art was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	14	50	90.0	7	32.3	18.6	70.5
English Literature	12	91.6	97.9	50	42.9	40.8	83.3
Design and technology	8	100	91.9	25	30.6	35	70.9
Geography	1	100	96.4	0	34.9	30	77.3
IT	8	100	88.2	50	22.1	42.5	63.3

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
Biology	17	100	91.6	0	36.3	54.1	74.1
English Literature	8	100	98.5	0	43.7	47.5	84.3
Design and technology	9	100	95.3	55.6	35.5	91.1	76.5
Geography	6	100	97.1	16.7	40.5	73.3	80.9
IT	9	100	89.1	44.4	22.4	88.0	64.1

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business intermediate	5	100		40		20	
Art intermediate]	2	100		0		0	

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

172. One GCSE re-sit lesson was observed. Two Year 12 and two Year 13 A level English Literature lessons were observed. Five in all

173. The provision for English in the sixth form is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good teaching in the subject.
- Positive attitudes displayed by students.
- The current standards achieved in the subject.
- Increase insufficient opportunities for students to become independent learners, through the use of well-planned group activities.

Commentary

174. Students attainment upon entry into the A level course is average. Because of good and very good teaching they achieve well with the result that students gained above average grades in the most recent examinations. Standards in the 2002 examinations were well below average.

175. Students displayed good oral skills and are able to articulate their ideas and opinions in a confident and extended manner. Some of the more able students are capable of making very mature and perceptive comments about the texts they are studying. In contrast some students are less secure in their speaking skills and are sometimes reluctant to make a full and active contribution to oral activities. Teachers ensure inclusion through direct question to the more passive members of the group.

176. Most students in Years 12 and 13 are good readers. Critical and analytical skills are well taught with the result most students develop good reading for understanding skills and are able to read for subtext. They can appreciate the writer's use of language to convey style and tone and to explore ideas, issues and themes.

177. Students have good writing skills using their good knowledge of the works they have studied to make a strong personal response to the questions asked of them. The most able of students focus on the ideas and concepts in the question and explore these issues in depth, through the presentation of a well-structured argument supported by appropriate quotations and relevant evidence from the play or novel they have studied. Less secure students move away from what is being asked of them and include evidence irrelevant to the question being asked of them.

178. The good progress made by students owes much to their positive attitudes towards their work and their genuine enthusiasm for the subject.

179. The overall quality of teaching in the subject is good, with some very good teaching features. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and convey it to students in an interesting and challenging manner. Lessons are well planned, organised and managed, though sometimes lessons are overly teacher directed with too few opportunities for students to engage in collaborative learning, through organised group activities.

180. Leadership and management in the subject are satisfactory. An appropriate course is in place to support teachers in their teaching of the subject, with satisfactory marking and assessment procedures to ensure that students have a clear understanding of what they need to improve.

181. Standards in the subject have improved since the last inspection.

SCIENCE

182. Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject.
- Students are dedicated to their studies.
- Students of all abilities and interests are well supported.
- Assessment and monitoring of students' progress is thorough.
- ICT is not used sufficiently in the collection, processing and interpretation of data.

Commentary

183. In 2002, no students took this subject at the higher A2 Level. Students who have recently entered the A/S level examinations achieved pass grades similar to the national average but they did not achieve the highest grades. Students in the current Year 13 are now completing the full A2 course. From lesson observations and analysis of their work they are working to standards within course requirements. Their predicted grades suggest students will gain pass grades.

184. Students of all abilities are well supported as individuals. Their work is completed with care and attention to accuracy and detail. They are motivated and they work to the best of their abilities. They achieve well against their standards at entry to Year 12.

185. The quality of teaching is good. In a Year 12 lesson concepts were developed very well. Good explanations follow interesting challenges, for example whilst learning about the group one metals the students were suddenly asked which would be the largest of three given ions or atoms with similar electron configurations. They all got it wrong but there was excellent learning in the explanation. Theoretical components of the course are taught well and to a good standard. The students' practical experience is good and further challenges their scientific thinking whilst developing their skills of experimental enquiry, data analysis and interpretation. However ICT is not used enough to enhance the students' understanding, interpretation and presentation of data and to monitor experiments by direct sampling through sensors.

186. It is a combination of the students' dedication and interest and the pace and rigour of the lessons that lead to good learning in this subject. The teachers know their subject well and they teach with enthusiasm and dedication. The teachers know their students well and they all receive encouragement and support appropriate to their interests and abilities. Lessons are taught with sufficient depth to challenge and extend the learning of the highest attaining students. The students are well motivated and involved with their studies. They work independently when required to do so to research their studies. They believe that the quality of their learning is good and they are fully confident that it will enable them to achieve their ambitions.

187. The head of faculty leads this subject, in which he is a specialist, to a good standard. Two technicians provide good support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more advanced equipment required for these courses.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

188. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good, enthusiastic and very knowledgeable teaching leads to high standards.
- There is very good provision to meet the students individual needs.
- Students of all abilities and ambitions achieve very well.
- Students have a very positive attitude to their learning.
- Limited access to some computer facilities for students outside of formal lessons.

Commentary

189. In 2002 the students' attainment in A2 examinations in ICT (Computing) was well above the national average. All the candidates achieved a pass grade and half of them gained a grade A or B. Students have achieved consistently well over the previous four years. From the work seen in the current Year 13 standards remain well above requirements for the course. Male and female students do equally well.

190. In Year 13, for example, one student's project shows excellent work. She has conducted an investigation to design and test an information technology solution for the day-to-day management of a sports shop. Her research involved designing, programming and testing a bespoke stock control system. Her work shows insight and originality coupled to the confidence and tenacity to reach a viable solution.

191. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. Very good teaching was seen in a Year 13 group. Good planning and the high expectations enabled the students to complete their individual studies with the secure support of an experienced and knowledgeable teacher. The advice empowered them to move on with their studies independently. This style of teaching is consistent and it leads to very good quality learning throughout Years 12 and 13.

192. The students are confident and highly motivated. They are attentive and concerned with the quality and accuracy of their work. They work independently when required to do so to research their studies. They believe that the quality of their learning is good and they are fully confident that it will enable them to achieve their ambitions. It is a combination of these very positive attitudes and the high expectations of the teachers that give rise to a very high level of achievement.

193. The students' work is monitored regularly. Helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. The students feel that they are well informed about the progress they are making with their work. Students who are not studying this subject now receive a sound education in the use of ICT as part of a basic skills course. This is an improvement since the last inspection. However the students report that access to computing facilities for private study are limited. Limited on line access for all post 16 students restricts individual research and limits on line experience.

194. In all other ways Post-16 provision for this subject is managed to a very good standard. The teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity in learning. Standards have remained very high since the last OFSTED inspection for this course.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching
- Good standard of student achievement
- Development of ICT, especially in the areas of CAD/CAM
- Interface between Year 11 and 6th form

Commentary

196. The department provides one course in the sixth form of 'A' level Product Design. This course enables students to specialise in graphics. Good results of the seven candidates in this year's 'A' level examination were:- 1 x A, 1 x B, 3 x C and 2 x D grades.

197. Attainment during lessons is good and work seen during the inspection indicates that good progress is being made. Students demonstrated a wide range of skills and techniques. Understanding of the design process is good and students provide evidence of the development of individual style. Students are disciplined and focused. They show interest and concentrate on their work for appropriate periods of time. Students have developed a capacity for individual work and they work hard. Design folders reflect the wide range of techniques used as they develop their ideas and research their topics. Overall the presentational quality of project folders is very good and there is evidence of highly innovative work. Achievement is high on the course but staff may want to seek greater compatibility between some GCSE courses and the Product Design programme.

198. Attitudes are positive, behaviour is good and relationships sound. Motivation is high and students are keen to do well. They respond to challenges enthusiastically. They observe codes of conduct and are polite and friendly.

199. The teacher has high expectations and lessons are planned with meticulous care. The teaching style is appropriate for sixth formers and is designed to help them reach their highest standards. Lessons are brisk, structured and with clear objectives. Relationships are very good and students respond with enjoyment. The quality of teaching is very good and this is clearly reflected in the value-added element of the students' results.

200. On occasions, teaching is outstanding. In a Year 12 lesson on product design, an experienced teacher who related very well to the class, demonstrated how to join pieces of glass. The students were very interested and attentive, concentrating on the skills involved in the teacher's demonstration. Clear emphasis was given to safety features. Very positive attitudes combined with the teacher's important effect on the work rate of students increased interest and involvement. The teacher was very persuasive yet totally appropriate to sixth form students. He insisted on high standards to which the students responded well.

201. The 'A' level programme is planned and delivered by one teacher. The absence of a regular teaching room throws a heavy burden on to a teacher who has to move resources and equipment around the school. Worksheets and support documents are of very good quality and supplement the use of other texts. Use of ICT facilities and the development of individual project work is difficult without a teaching base. Staff and students are to be congratulated on their resourcefulness. Good use is made of the local college of higher education to extend the scope of the school programme for the development of CAD/CAM.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Music

202. Provision in music results from a partnership with Wycombe High School for Girls where it is wholly provided. This has proved **very good** for those few students who in recent years have wished to pursue music post 16. Although standards attained have sometimes been unsatisfactory, the quality of teaching, learning and achievement for these students has been very good, allowing them to realise their potential.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical Education

203. Provision for physical education in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- Committed and hard working students.
- Very good relationships between students and their teachers lead to high expectations for attainment and good progress.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Some students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.
- Good recreational sports opportunities for all students in the 6th form.

Commentary

204. Results in the July 2002 AS and A level examinations were in line with the national averages for the proportion of students achieving a pass grade, but below for those achieving higher grades. The achievement of the students on current courses is good in relation to their attainment at GCSE examination. The seven students currently taking the A2 examination are producing work that is at least in line with national expectations, with a few doing even better. Students are able to engage in productive debates about a range of related topics. An example of this quality of work was seen when students were observed putting forward their views on the effects of feedback on sporting performance very clearly and forcibly. Students' course work files are of good quality and indicate that the demands of the A2 syllabus are being met.

205. The three students in Year 12 taking the A2 examinations have only recently begun the course, but are already making good progress. They share a good rapport with their teachers and relationships between the students and teachers are good. However students do rely heavily on their teachers who work hard for them. Some students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning and do not always take advantage of study time. Students readily use the Internet to broaden their knowledge, and to research individual topics.

206. The quality of teaching of the A level courses is good. Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives that are shared with students. Teachers know their subject well, demonstrating high levels of scholarship and awareness of students' learning needs. Assignment work is demanding. Teachers know their students well, and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are skilled at asking just the right questions in order to prompt thought and enter discussions.

207. Attendance in the lesson was high. Students respond well to the good teaching. The subject is well led and managed. Teachers involved in the sixth form courses work well together, sharing views on successful ways of teaching, and show a very strong commitment to their students.

BUSINESS STUDIES

208. Provision for Business Studies is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall very good quality of the teaching is a strong element of the provision
- The results in the Intermediate GNVQ are good
- The students achieve well due to high expectations by the teachers
- More structured differentiation to cater for a wider range of abilities in the classes
- More computers are needed to help with the learning

Commentary

209. The number of students entered for the Intermediate GNVQ qualification is as yet quite small and so not yet statistically significant. Nonetheless the standard of attainment is above average. Of the 7 entries in 2003, there were 4 merits and 3 passes. In 2002, there were 5 entries, 1 gained a distinction, two gained merits and the others passes. In 2001 there were 5 entries, 2 gained merits and the other passes. The standard reached by the current students is broadly of a similar standard. The students have a significant amount of written work in their folders and so their written skills are good. The students are able to do research work by contacting companies and by using the internet. The students can make good verbal but need some encouragement to do this. The overall achievement of students is good as the teaching makes strong demands on them. The progress of students who have special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language is satisfactory though they would benefit further from work more directly tailored to their needs. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

210. The teaching is overall very good in about equal proportion. All lessons are well prepared and a good range of activities is used to put across the subject matter. Expectations are high and so a significant amount of learning is done in the time available. Homework is set and the students work is assessed in a detailed and helpful way. The very good lessons are characterised by a firm control of the students and the objectives of the learning are very clear to the students themselves. As a result the students are well behaved and apply themselves to their work. Across the teaching in general, more provision in the form of structured differentiated work would be of benefit to the wider range of abilities in the classes. All lessons are characterised by strong subject expertise and the teaching endeavours to relate the students learning to real situations in the business world. In the teaching generally, information technology is used where it is possible and the department makes a significant contribution to literacy with the introduction, explanation and use of new words and phrases

211. The leadership and management of the subject is very good. The staffing is very good. The resources are satisfactory overall but there are insufficient computers for learning to be done to the extent that the teaching would wish. The accommodation is satisfactory but cramped for the number of the students that use the room. No issues were raised at the last inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).