

INSPECTION REPORT

NEWENT COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Newent

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115762

Headteacher: Mrs D Paveling

Lead inspector: Mrs W Hola

Dates of inspection: 22nd September – 1st October 2003

Inspection number: 259233

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1438
School address:	Watery Lane Newent Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL18 1QF
Telephone number:	01531 820550
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr L Carter
Date of previous inspection:	16 th March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Newent Community School is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18. It is a foundation school, formerly grant maintained, and for about 12 years has acted as a community school. The school is a community education provider for adult accredited courses. In 2002, the school achieved Specialist Arts College status. It received the Artsmark award in 2002 and the Sportsmark award in 2003.

The school has 1438 students (699 boys and 739 girls), 261 of whom are in the sixth form. It is larger than other secondary schools. Half of the students come from rural villages and the remainder roughly equally from Newent town and from Gloucester city. Newent is a market town, ten miles west of Gloucester, mainly with a rural economy based on farming and horticulture. The school is the largest employer.

The school draws students from a wide range of attainment levels and social circumstances, and overall the profile is average. Because there are grammar schools in the area, the school does not have as high a proportion of very able students as in a typical comprehensive school. The proportion of students claiming free school meals is well below the national average. There are few students from minority ethnic groups and the vast majority has a white British heritage. The proportion of students whose mother tongue is not English is low. The proportions of students with special educational needs and those with statements of special educational needs are average. Most students who need support beyond action which can be taken by the school itself have specific or moderate learning difficulties, some have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and there are a few who have either hearing impairment, are autistic or another specific difficulty, such as Down's syndrome.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
4359	Mrs W Hola	Lead inspector	
8992	Mr J Vischer	Lay inspector	
15268	Mr J English	Team inspector	Mathematics
17530	Mrs M Cureton	Team inspector	English Special educational needs
12762	Mr R Catchpole	Team inspector	Science
8052	Mr K McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies (sixth form)
30518	Mr M Johnson	Team inspector	Art and design
10385	Mr K Hopkins	Team inspector	Design and technology
4317	Mr K Madrell	Team inspector	Geography
30794	Ms G Murray	Team inspector	History
30922	Mr P Thompson	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
11672	Mr P Harle	Team inspector	Music
23030	Ms C Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
18912	Ms C Large	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship
2067	Mr J Hall	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
2561	Mr A Byrne	Team inspector	English (sixth form)
27585	Mr K Hounslow	Team inspector	Chemistry (sixth form) Physics (sixth form)
3390	Mr K Thomas	Team inspector	Psychology (sixth form)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school in which students flourish and develop academically and personally to achieve well and attain above average standards as a result of the good education provided. Students grow into responsible, confident, courteous and considerate young people because the school's ethos encourages this growth so very effectively. **The school provides good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher and governors display a very clear commitment to moving the school forward to greater achievements and in an entirely appropriate direction.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with some outstanding practice particularly in art and design and music; good relationships exist between students and teachers.
- The good curriculum is enhanced by very good extra-curricular provision and by links with the community and partner schools and colleges.
- The school's care, support and guidance promote students' self-esteem and confidence, and result in their good all-round development; students are motivated to learn.
- The sixth form is a strength of the school and its students make a valuable contribution to school life.
- The high quality provision in art and design and the school's status as a Specialist Arts College are beginning to inspire the work of the school in many areas.
- Many students are able to evaluate well their own learning but, in general, they do not have a clear view of what to expect next nor precisely how to improve.
- The school is in the process of drawing together the many well-laid strands for improving the quality of teaching and learning; this process must be sharpened to result in a thoroughly coherent and well-understood strategy supported by a robust management structure.
- The school has some sound procedures for communication but parents and students are not entirely clear about the ways in which the school seeks and considers their views.

The school has made good improvement since its last inspection in 1998: the curriculum has been reviewed and improved; considerable progress has been made to extend the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects and in all years; assessment and target setting procedures have developed well; homework and marking are effective and time is used well. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Standards have shown a rising trend in recent years but have not risen as fast as those nationally.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Newent Community School performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	B	B	C
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	N/a	B	C	

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

At all stages, students achieve well and standards are above average. Standards of students in the current Year 9 are above average; they are particularly high in mathematics and science. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are above average overall. GCSE results have been rising overall since 1998. They dipped in 2003, although achievement was still good from a slightly weaker group of students than in previous years. GCSE results in 2002 were strongest in business studies when compared to students' results in their other subjects. Most students achieve well in relation to their test scores on entry to the school. Current standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are above average and students are able to work well independently. Students throughout the school generally

possess good skills in English, literacy, mathematics and ICT and apply them well in their studies. Students with special educational needs and those who are able and talented achieve well in the school because of the generally appropriate provision made to support them.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. Students have very positive attitudes to being in school and these are reflected in the very good attendance figures. Behaviour is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The school community is very orderly. Students act very responsibly and with respect for the views and feelings of others. Relationships between students and staff and students themselves are very good and nurtured very well. Sixth-form students are very enterprising and very willing to take on responsibility. Just occasionally, students can be disruptive in lessons and behaviour around the school deteriorates.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good as are the curriculum, support and guidance and these all enable students to achieve well. Art and design is a particular strength and so is music. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science are all strong. Some opportunities to develop literacy skills across the curriculum are missed. Most lessons are interesting and engaging so that **students build well on their previous learning.** In a minority of lessons, pace is slow, there is not enough challenge or tasks are not matched to the needs of some students. **Assessment** is generally **good** and, in the main, teachers have a clear understanding of students' prior attainment levels and what can be expected of them. Marking is generally good. Some good links with other schools, colleges and the community enhance provision as does the very good range of extra-curricular activities that not only contribute well to the standards attained, academic and personal, but also to the enjoyment of school life.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides very good leadership. Significant changes have been made to the senior leadership team which is developing into an increasingly effective force for school improvement. Individual members discharge their responsibilities well but the team is yet to act in a thoroughly concerted way to drive standards and teaching quality up further. Middle management is generally good, and there are some excellent role models amongst the managers of the school. School governance is good.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students generally show support for the school. In particular, they feel it is a good school to be at and that the teaching is good. A large minority of parents and students does not feel the school seeks their views. A smaller but significant minority feels that the school is not well led and managed. Many students agree that there is bullying in the school and some poor behaviour by a minority students. Some students are concerned about being treated fairly. Inspectors were made aware of a few cases of bullying and saw occasional poor behaviour but no unfair treatment. In discussions with inspectors, most students spoke positively about their school experiences, and concerns were few although similar in nature to those expressed in questionnaires.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things that this already good school should do to improve are:

- Continue to develop students' understanding of their learning so that they can evaluate well their own levels of attainment. Ensure that students also have a clear view of what will be studied next and what is expected of them in terms of subject-specific improvements.
- Add even greater impetus to developing further the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- Strengthen the links between senior and middle managers to achieve a greater consistency and coherence to the process of meeting the school's own clearly stated and appropriate targets.
- Ensure that students and parents understand and value the school's methods of communicating with them, seeking their views and taking account of them as appropriate.
- The school should strive to provide a daily act of collective worship.

SIXTH FORM SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good, cost-effective sixth form, and its students achieve well. It has made good improvement since the last inspection: results have improved, although not as fast as those nationally; the curriculum has been enhanced and resources improved, particularly in ICT.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards of work are above average in many subjects.
- Students use well their good skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT to aid learning in many lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good overall. In a third of lessons, they are very good because of tasks and teaching styles there are particularly challenging and interesting.
- Provision in art and design is excellent.
- Opportunities for curriculum enrichment are very good.
- The sixth-form staff team is very effective in supporting students.
- Sixth-form students contribute greatly to the life of the school and are very good role models for younger students.
- In some lessons or subjects, students are not encouraged enough to articulate their ideas and opinions or to evaluate their own work.
- The school considers and takes account of students' views but systems for doing this are not as strong, nor as clear, to students as they might be.
- The curriculum is good but the range of vocational courses is narrow.

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	Very good in English. Standards are above average and achievement good. Very good, reflective teaching engages students greatly. Leadership is excellent. Standards and achievement are good in drama. Very good in French. Lessons are very good, interesting and challenging. Numbers of students are small. There is no foreign language assistant.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics. Achievement is good and results above average. Students use ICT very effectively. Very good teaching employs challenging questions and skilful explanations but marking is not always satisfactory. A few students take further mathematics and do well.
Science	Very good in chemistry and also very good in physics. In both chemistry and physics, achievement is good and standards above average. Both courses are very good because they include interesting applications and because good teaching includes very good, challenging questioning techniques. In biology, standards have been well above average from 1998 to 2001 and are now above average.
Information and communication technology	This area was sampled. Teaching is good and teachers have very good subject knowledge. The range of courses offered is good. Students' competence in ICT is good and generally applied well in other subjects.

Humanities	<p>Good in geography. Students achieve well and standards are above average. The quality of coursework assignments is very high. Teaching is good and many varied and interesting techniques are used. Very good teaching and learning were seen in history where standards have fluctuated and are generally above average.</p> <p>Satisfactory in psychology. Teaching is good and the subject is popular; numbers are increasing. Students' progress is not always monitored thoroughly. Standards are average and achievement satisfactory.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<p>Good in design and technology. Standards are average but improving and students achieve well. Lessons are very well planned but students are not always sufficiently self-critical. Textiles and food and nutrition were sampled and good provision seen. Standards in these subjects are above average and the design and technology department as a whole has improved greatly since the last inspection because of very good leadership.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Excellent in art and design. Standards are consistently above the national average. Provision includes very good teaching and learning with rich curriculum experiences. Leadership in both art and design and music is inspirational. In music, teaching is also very good; students' attitudes are excellent and examination results are well above average.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<p>Good in physical education. Students achieve well and standards are above average. Teaching on the Community Sports Leaders Award is excellent.</p>
Business	<p>Very good in business studies. Teaching and learning are very effective with good use of ICT and good links with the local business community. Standards were below average but they have risen considerably. In economics, examination results for the few entries were above average. Recent results in AVCE business were below average but current work is good.</p>

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Personal and academic support for students is **very good**. Students have very good access to well-informed and impartial guidance on courses and careers. In most lessons and courses, students are given clear indications about how to improve their work but, in some subjects, marking or regular monitoring of work is not undertaken regularly or sufficiently well.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is led very effectively. The senior teachers in the sixth form are very effective managers and lead a strong team of tutors very well. The school is constantly striving to develop further its curriculum provision so that an even wider range of courses is available for the increasing student numbers; links with colleges are being considered. Some good work is undertaken to evaluate what the school provides and achieves but this is yet to be done systematically and thoroughly.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

In the questionnaires, roughly 90 per cent of students stated that they enjoy being in the sixth form, teaching is challenging and demanding, they are helped and encouraged to study, teachers are helpful and accessible and that courses suit their abilities. Thirty per cent or more of students, for each of the points listed, disagreed that: there is an adult that knows them well; they had helpful advice on what to study; have well-informed careers advice; the school seeks and responds to their views; students get on well together; and that the school is well run. The positive comments were repeated in

discussions with inspectors. The negative ones were raised to a far lesser extent and inspectors did not substantiate them. During the inspection, students displayed considerable satisfaction in what the school provides and what it has enabled them to achieve.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards are above average overall and most students achieve well at all stages. Students perform well in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. GCSE examination results have been maintained at above average levels since the last inspection and results were significantly above average in roughly a third of subjects in 2002. Results in the sixth form are above average and sixth-form students achieve well. Overall, girls generally perform better than boys.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good foundations are laid in the core subjects and these serve students well as they progress through the school.
- Students have good skills in English, literacy, mathematics and ICT and most use them well across the curriculum; some lower attaining students have weak literacy skills.
- There are no huge differences in examination performance between subjects in Year 11; business studies and science were relatively stronger in 2002 but results in all subjects, broadly speaking, are at or above national averages.
- The school has maintained above average standards since the previous inspection.
- The school recognises the need to improve the performance of boys.
- Sixth-form students achieve well, and a high proportion of students take up places in further or higher education.

Commentary

1. Students' attainment on entry to the school is average overall and has been at a similar level for several years. In the last two years, there has been a slight decrease in attainment on entry but it is still broadly average. The school is in a local education authority where grammar schools receive approximately the top ten per cent of the most able students, although some very able students in this category attend Newent Community School. This means that the school has fewer of the most able students than a typical comprehensive school.
2. The school's results in the Year 9 national tests were above average compared with all schools nationally in both 2001 and 2002. In 2003, results were the same in English and went up slightly in mathematics and science. Results at this stage have been improving but not as fast as those nationally. In relation to students' attainment on entry, the 2002 results show good achievement in science, average achievement in mathematics but lower than average achievement in English. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys in English but in mathematics and science, attainment is broadly similar. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, a higher than average proportion of students reached the higher levels (Levels 6 and 7) in the Year 9 tests in 2002 and this shows that the school is working effectively with these more able students. The school's own analysis shows that progress is good for most students and that students with special educational needs or in other minority groups also achieve well.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.01 (34.2)	33.3 (33.0)
Mathematics	36.4 (35.7)	34.7 (34.4)
Science	35.3 (35.5)	33.3 (33.1)

There were 239 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average for the proportion of students obtaining five or more grades A*-C and above average for the proportions obtaining five or more grades A*-G and for one or more grades A*-G. Taking account of all available value-added measures, achievement for this group of students was above average. Results have risen from 61 per cent of students obtaining grades A*-C in 1998 to 67 per cent in 2002. (The national figures were 45 per cent in 1998 and 50 per cent in 2002). The school figure dropped to 64 per cent in 2003; this result still shows good achievement because the cohort of students was a slightly weaker one than in the previous year.
4. The 2002 GCSE results were significantly above average in business studies, science (double award), drama, English, French, mathematics and physical education. Students did best in business studies and double award science, compared with the other subjects they took.
5. Standards and achievements in this school, as in many others, are primarily linked to the quality of teaching, which is good. The teaching in the core subjects is particularly secure and lays good foundations for most students in their work in other subjects, although some lower attaining students display weaknesses in literacy. Students' skills in English language, literacy, mathematics and ICT are good overall.
6. Standards were observed to be well above average in geography in Years 7 to 9 and also well above average in English, mathematics, science, art and design, music, business studies, drama and French in Years 10 and 11. The main reason for these high-quality outcomes was the teaching by subject specialists with very good subject knowledge and the capacity to engage students with interesting and challenging tasks. This teaching also keeps a close check on students' progress and keeps them well informed about how to improve their work.
7. Target-setting procedures are robust and include a reasonable element of challenge. The school has met and, in places, exceeded its targets.
8. The school has rightly identified the need to improve boys' performance whose overall performance was 20 percentage points behind that of girls in 2003; a higher figure than the one in 2002. Reasons for this are varied but include lower levels of interest in lessons and lower attainment on entry. The school is actively working to reduce this difference.

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	67 (64)	50 (48)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (92)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	39.9	39.8

There were 226 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth Form

9. Standards are above average in the sixth form. A-level results in 2001 were above average for both boys and girls; they were average overall in 2002 (with girls above average and boys average). The 2003 A-level results show improvement over those in 2002 with a considerable increase in the proportion of high grades, A or B, in that just over 50 per cent of entries resulted in these high grades compared with about 40 per cent in 2002. The highest results, based on average point scores in 2002, were in English, chemistry, physics, music and economics. In 2003, the highest results were in English, physics, French, German, music, art and design and three-dimensional studies.

10. Taking account of students' performance at GCSE, achievement is good overall. In the following subjects, achievement in 2002, based on measurement of progress since GCSE, was best in English, physics, physical education, economics, art and design and graphics. In 2003, achievement was best in English, physics, French, art and design, three-dimensional studies and graphics.
11. The average point score per candidate rose from 2001 to 2002 but not as fast as nationally. In 2001, standards were above the national average but in 2002 they were average because of the greater increase nationally. The provisional results for 2003 show yet another overall improvement in results. These figures must be seen in the context of a changing sixth form, one which is receiving students with a wider range of abilities. The 2002 results show that students' achievements are good.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.4	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	39.1 (51)	39.4
Average point score per student	244.1 (224.1)	263.3 (na)

There were 122 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points

12. In the eleven sixth-form subjects looked at in detail on this inspection, students were found to be achieving very well in business studies, art and design, English and French. Achievement was good in physical education, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography and design and technology, and it was satisfactory in psychology. Achievement was best in those subjects or lessons where teaching focused very sharply on what each student had done well, on what needed to be improved and where there was very good, regular guidance on how to improve.
13. Students overall demonstrate effective study skills and the ability to work independently. They have good skills in literacy and, in many subjects, take notes and write well. Their competence in mathematics and ICT is also good and often put to very good use in research and presentation.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students have **very positive attitudes** to school and these are reflected in the **very good attendance** figures. **Behaviour is good** in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Punctuality is good throughout the school. **Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good** because it is so very well supported. The school community is very orderly and staff and students are very confident, courteous and considerate.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school stimulates very effectively a desire to learn.
- Most students take care and pride in the presentation of their work.
- Relationships between students and staff and students themselves are very good and nurtured very well.
- The school sets consistently high expectations for students' conduct.
- Sixth-form students take a great interest in school life. They are very enterprising and very willing to take on responsibility.
- Students act very responsibly and with great respect for the views and feelings of others.
- Occasionally, students are disruptive in lessons and behaviour around the school deteriorates.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.
- Tutorial sessions are generally sound but students' portfolios of achievement are often scantily filled in.

Commentary

14. In many lessons, and through visits and other events, the school stimulates a strong desire to learn which is reflected in the above average standards achieved and very good attendance. Students in art and design and music are motivated to a particularly high degree. Students are generally highly motivated and keen to achieve as well as they can. In Years 8 and 9, students' attitudes are not as strong as in other year groups but they are still good. Sometimes, even in Year 12, students' very good attitudes and behaviour can fall and therefore reduce the effectiveness of a lesson. When moving around the school, students can occasionally become over-exuberant and thoughtlessly create a hazard to others. In the main, however, break-times are friendly and relaxed. There have been only a few exclusions in recent years.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.5	School data	0.5
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other White background
Mixed – any other mixed background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese

Exclusions in the last school year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1403	90	4
13	0	0
19	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0

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

15. The school promotes good relationships very well through the vertically grouped house and tutorial system. This integrates students well into a family group in which they remain throughout their stay in Years 7 to 11. It also acts as a very good vehicle for the school to relay its high expectations of students' conduct and it establishes a good forum where bullying concerns, for example, can be shared and discussed. Tutorial time is generally used well to strengthen relationships. Relationships are very positive throughout the school and, in the art and design department, they are excellent. The keeping of students' portfolios to show achievement is well conceived but, in practice, not carried out methodically in tutorial time and records are often very scant.
16. Students are very interested in school life and the range of activities provided, especially in the sixth form. Students are very generous in their support for charities. Students' very positive attitudes and good behaviour help generate the happy atmosphere of the school.

17. Although students of all age groups expressed concerns about certain aspects of school life, the vast majority replying to the questionnaire and nearly all of those interviewed enjoy being in school. The questionnaire analysis did not match closely with the views students expressed in conversations with inspectors; the verbal responses were generally more positive than the written ones.
18. Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities are very well developed by the school. In particular, the school works hard to foster the sense of self-worth of students with special educational needs and this develops their confidence and maturity.
19. The school provides very good opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Its ethos fosters self-understanding and respect for others and underpins policies and practices. Students' understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and circumstances of others is well promoted in the house festival week, assemblies and lessons such as religious education, personal, social and health education, English and drama. Students are enabled to express their feelings creatively through art and design, music and drama. Outline plans are prepared for assemblies which include some broadly Christian themes but the school recognises that it does not meet statutory requirements for collective worship.
20. The moral and social development of students is a strength of the school. There is a very strong sense of community encouraged by the house system. Students have a good sense of right and wrong.
21. There is a very good range of activities which promote cultural development within the curriculum and as extra-curricular opportunities. This is another strength of the school and teachers give generously of their time. The link with a Kenyan school is one very good example of how students are enabled to understand and appreciate cultures different from their own. In this respect, there has been an improvement since the last inspection.

Sixth Form

22. Sixth-form students have very positive attitudes to the school and also have a big impact on the life of the school through their willingness to be enterprising and to take responsibility in the organising of fund-raising and house events, for example. They set a very good example, both in supporting and in organising activities such as the blood donor programme for the community and the Christmas box appeal. Sixth-form attendance is very good.
23. As in the main school, students' views of the school were very positively expressed in discussions with inspectors but less so in the written questionnaires. Inspectors confirmed students' positive views of the school. Inspectors did not substantiate their negative views but agreed that the school could do more to explain systems for seeking and taking account of students' views.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good because teaching, learning, the curriculum, assessment, support and guidance are all effective and enable students to achieve well. There are no major shortcomings in provision but some inconsistencies exist in and between subjects, primarily relating to the quality of teaching. Some good links with other schools, colleges and the community enhance provision, as does the very good range of extra-curricular activities that not only contribute well to the standards attained but also to the enjoyment of school life.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Most lessons are interesting and engaging so that students build well on their previous learning. In a minority of lessons, pace is slow, there is not enough challenge or tasks are not matched to the needs of, primarily, the least able. **Assessment** is generally **good** and, in the main, teachers have a clear understanding of students' prior attainment levels and what students can be expected to achieve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and many transmit to students their own enthusiasm for the subject.
- Teachers have good class management skills overall. In most classes, there is a pleasant working atmosphere.
- Brisk pace and variety of approaches in most lessons ensure that students are engaged in the tasks set and sustain concentration.
- Overall assessment is good but students do not always get sufficient guidance in their books on what they need to do to improve.
- Learning support assistants are very effective.
- Some very effective use is made of ICT but this is uneven across and within subjects, often because access to resources is limited.
- The extent to which all teachers promote students' skills in literacy is too varied.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 189 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8 (4%)	53 (28%)	93 (49%)	30 (16%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

24. High quality teaching was seen in a third of lessons. In such lessons, students work with real interest and rise to high expectations, responding very well to the teachers' probing questioning. It is the high quality questioning skills that are the most distinctive features of the best lessons in this school and such teaching was seen to draw out extremely effectively students' views, opinions, uncertainties and their gains in learning. Students feel confident about sharing their ideas and joining in the class discussions. The other distinctive feature is fun and, in some of the best lessons, students clearly enjoyed their learning in the presence of an enthusiastic and often energetic teacher who presented tasks that captured and held interest. In these best lessons, the students are challenged to think and to solve problems for themselves, whilst developing the subject-specific skills. Students also have a clear view about what they are aiming for.
25. Teaching is very good in science and in art and design and music in Years 10 and 11, in English, French, art and design and business studies in the sixth form and good elsewhere. In English, it is good overall and slightly better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7, 8 and 9. In modern foreign languages, teaching is good overall but there are some shortcomings in Years 7 to 9.
26. Some excellent teaching and learning were seen in the main school in:
 - A Year 7 French lesson where the teacher captured students' total attention, greatly encouraged students, including both reluctant students and the gifted and talented, and gave them all a full range of opportunities to practise speaking.
 - A Year 11 lesson on the 'health of the nation' with exceptionally well-prepared resources and outstanding support and challenge so that students learned with great enthusiasm.

- A Year 10 French lesson with superb, but not over-effusive, use of praise, and a wide range of engaging techniques to cover some fine points of French grammar that students grasped and then used extremely well.
 - A Year 8 ICT lesson with extremely high expectations; students were beginning to create simple web pages; the teacher demonstrated very effectively the difference between 'word' and 'html' files; students made tremendous progress in a short time.
 - A Year 7 science lesson on the use of the microscope with excellent use of the interactive whiteboard making the lesson tremendous fun with challenging questions.
27. Just a few unsatisfactory lessons were seen in mathematics and modern foreign languages. The main shortcomings in these lessons related to:
- A lack of an assertive approach in dealing with disruptions from students.
 - Insufficient use of the target language in modern foreign language lessons.
 - Lack of challenge in the work set.
 - Poor assessment of students' attainment so that work did not build upon prior learning.
 - Not dealing with disengaged students and setting tasks that lacked interest or challenge (and the cold room did not help).
 - The use of a lecture style of teaching that was ill suited to the students in the class and which overestimated their capabilities.
28. In some other lessons not judged unsatisfactory, there were nevertheless some relatively minor shortcomings. In such lessons, students' achievements were found to be satisfactory but they could have been better because:
- The tasks set did not always fully extend the most able or meet the needs of the lower attaining students.
 - Some lower ability students needed more help to develop their literacy skills and to build more useful note records of their work.
 - Sometimes students were content to receive knowledge passively and were not prompted into contributing their ideas.
 - Verbal and written feedback was not always as explicit or helpful as it could be.
29. The school makes good use of specially adapted materials in lessons which help students with special educational needs to learn. Students' individual education plans provide teachers with good advice on teaching methods which are likely to succeed. The school's learning support teachers and assistants are a key strength. They know their students well and make good and appropriate interventions to support their learning in the classroom. Teaching and learning in the support centre are consistently good: the best lessons have a multi-sensory dimension and are based on students' individual learning plans.
30. Some teaching promotes students' speaking and note-taking skills very well, and makes good use of discussion and student presentation to enhance learning. Elsewhere, the chances to develop literacy skills are overlooked.
31. Some teaching makes very good use of ICT. In English, for example, in drafting and presenting work and in geography too. Many students use ICT well in their GCSE coursework, in design and technology for example. In some subjects, such as modern foreign languages, the use of ICT is uneven within the department because access to resources and the teachers' own competence and confidence are so unequal. In subjects such as religious education, insufficient use is currently being made of ICT for teaching and learning. In art and design, ICT use has improved but more use could be made of it. Students greatly enjoy lessons which involve the use of the interactive whiteboard. Such use of ICT is good but limited. The school is working to increase its use as resources are increased and staff confidence grows.
32. Assessment is very good in English and music and generally good elsewhere. Where assessment is strong, teachers know exactly what students have learned well and give them

very clear guidance on what is to be achieved next. Students are generally set good goals in terms of grades or levels for their achievement, but greater clarity should be provided for students about how specifically to improve their work in some subjects so that they can all reach the realistic targets devised by the school.

33. Assessment in citizenship has yet to be developed. Whilst the use of the citizenship 'stamp' is generally effective, students are not always clear about what constitutes citizenship and are not always guided well by teachers into a clearer understanding.
34. The school is currently working at developing various forms of visual learning, as part of its Specialist Arts College Status, and intends to support teachers in painting the 'big picture' of any given cycle of lessons, module or learning experience and enhancing visual aids generally. This is entirely appropriate. The best teaching already does this well.

Sixth Form

35. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good overall and very good in English, French, art and design and business studies. As in the main school, the best teaching occurs when challenging tasks are presented with a clear focus on developing very specific skills and understanding and where teaching includes high-quality questioning that encourages students to articulate their views and ideas and make good progress.
36. Examples of excellent teaching and learning in the sixth form were seen in:
 - A Year 13 business education lesson on research methods. The students were developing very good research skills as a result of the highly effective and detailed guidance on meeting course requirements. An extremely supportive atmosphere prevailed in which students could ask confidently about issues relating to coursework topics.
 - A Year 12 physical education after-school activity where there was obvious mutual respect between teacher and students. The lesson was very successful in teaching students how to organise sporting activities with great imagination and humour.
 - A Year 13 fine art lesson in which students' discussion about their figurative coursework was of outstanding quality.
37. Teaching in the sixth form is very effective in preparing students for success in examinations. Moreover, in most lessons, students are using and developing well their key skills in literacy, mathematics and ICT.

The curriculum

The breadth and quality of the curriculum are good overall. The school has restructured the curriculum this year in order to meet the students' needs more closely. **A very good range of enrichment opportunities is provided** and music, physical education and drama feature highly in this. The school's **accommodation and resources are good** and staff are particularly well qualified and experienced.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum in art and design is excellent and a major strength of the school.
- English, science, mathematics and business studies all have very good curricula.
- All students take an appropriate course of study in ICT and this is very good.
- A very strong voluntary commitment by a large number of staff enables students to benefit greatly from the very wide range of enrichment opportunities.
- The quality and quantity of resources at the school are good. The library is a very good resource.
- Provision for lower attaining students and for the gifted and talented is good in some subject areas but uneven overall and this is related partly to teaching and partly to curriculum provision.
- The school provides some vocational course but these are few.

- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship; this was also true at the time of the previous inspection and the one before.

Commentary

38. The curriculum is good overall and meets well students' varying needs. In English, science, mathematics and business studies, curricula are very good and, in art and design, the curriculum is excellent. The school has both the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards and these are a tribute to the richness of the curriculum in these areas both for school students and for the community. The curriculum, in the main, ensures that students' learning progresses smoothly, and that knowledge, skills and understanding are built firmly on secure prior learning. Where this is occasionally not the case, the reasons are to do with the quality of teaching rather than poor curriculum planning. Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good.
39. The school recently undertook a major curriculum review, the result of which has been a considerable adjustment to the curriculum pattern. The main change is in providing a range of 'pathways' for learning to suit particular groups of students. The new arrangements have only just been implemented and have yet to be reviewed. They appear to be successful, particularly for Years 10 and 11 but, for Years 7 to 9, they may need to be further adjusted to allow for greater flexibility for subjects to arrive at their own setting arrangements. Provision for design and technology and for modern foreign languages has been improved suitably in response to the key issues raised in the previous report. A daily act of collective worship is not provided.
40. The school curriculum provides specially-adapted learning activities to support the learning of all students with special educational needs. Well-informed and appropriate support for learning within and outside the school day is on hand in the learning centre. Accommodation in the centre is bright, attractive and adequate for purpose.
41. Provision for the gifted and talented students is good overall. These students flourish both through their subjects, for example in art and design and music, and through their involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In some subject areas, though, gifted students are barely adequately catered for. The school is currently auditing provision across all subject areas to sharpen its focus on these students and to develop a whole-school approach for them.
42. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 includes drama and this develops not only skills in drama but contributes greatly to students' attainment in English and to their overall personal development. For students in Years 10 and 11, there is a good range of subjects to choose from and timetabling arrangements generally ensure that students' subject combinations can be met. Some parents expressed concern that provision for modern foreign languages was too limited or that combinations of languages with some other subjects were not possible. A small range of vocational courses is available in Years 10 and 11.
43. Workplace learning and college links are good. Vocational courses and college links are managed and run effectively by very keen and enthusiastic staff who have developed a range of successful and well-planned programmes. They offer students interesting, challenging and valuable educational experiences which they would not have without this provision. For example, a group of 14- to 16-year-old students is out of school for one day a week to follow an NVQ course which includes a business placement in Year 11. This well-targeted programme has been successful with some challenging students. College link courses are complemented by a range of vocational courses in school, for example the applied health and social care and applied art and design which have links with appropriate organisations in the community. A group of 14- to 16-year-old students is involved in appropriate activities with the local fire service in order to broaden their experience of, and perspectives on, the working environment. The provision makes a valuable contribution to the school's very good inclusion programme. Vocational provision is not yet as well developed post-16 but it is improving, for example in business education. A limitation on funding is a constraining influence on further development in

this area.

44. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. Students can participate in an impressive range of challenging extra-curricular activities including visits, after-school clubs, music concerts and drama productions. Two good examples of this are the Brecon Beacons camp for all Year 9 students and the sixth-form winter expeditions to Norway. Year 8 students are responsible for running an annual arts festival which involves the wider community and the school is one of the few with a blood donor scheme. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is well supported by students. There is a very good programme of sporting activities on offer to all students. The extensive fixture list provides students with the opportunity to compete at local, county and national levels and in school house matches.
45. The school achieved specialist arts college status (visual arts) in 2002 and provision has been significantly enhanced as a result. Resources for, and use of, ICT have increased greatly, although more work is still to be done here, accommodation has improved and further building is in progress for the art and design department. The school has appointed a visual arts co-ordinator and launched a visual learning project although, as yet, the impact of this has yet to be felt. Numerous other activities, such as summer schools, work with partner schools, master classes, artists in residence, clubs, activities and festivals all indicate high- quality work in this field. Participation in the arts is excellent.
46. Community provision is good and caters well for a wide range of aptitudes, interests and local needs. The school is very aware of its place as a key focus within the local community. It runs a good adult education programme in partnership with ACET (Adult Continuing Education and Training) in Gloucestershire and the Newent Leisure and Wellness Centre. Courses are held in the school and in various halls in the locality. The courses offered include computing, GCSE English and mathematics, sports and exercise classes and a reasonable range of creative and artistic groups. There has been growth in community education since the last inspection, although this has slowed recently as the school has been unable to appoint a suitable candidate to the vacant position of head of community education. Nevertheless, the school is currently developing new courses to broaden the appeal of its provision, including more key skills for people returning to work and in ICT where the school ICT department already plays an important role. Some of the facilities are in need of upgrading in order to make them more suitable and attractive to potential clients. A wide range of community-based activities for pupils, many of them challenging, is also built into the school calendar and this has a very good impact in broadening attitudes and improving standards. After many years of providing for the community in this way, the school is now about to review arrangements, both in terms of the range of courses offered and in the way the provision is managed. Such a review is timely and appropriate.
47. The quality and quantity of resources at the school are good. The school is staffed well with teachers whose subject expertise is very good and with very effective support staff. Learning resources are generally good and they are very good in art and design and music. The library is a very good resource. It is staffed by a very effective and qualified librarian and an assistant and, in addition to a reasonable book stock, contains a good bank of computers that are used well by students throughout the day and also after school. Support for learning outside the school day is good. Study skills classes are provided for parents to help them support their children's independent learning more effectively.
48. Accommodation is good. There has been much improvement since the last inspection and significant building work is currently in progress to provide enhanced art and design provision. The school has identified further areas for improvement in its school improvement plan. Some temporary accommodation suffers from extremes of temperatures that have a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Sixth Form

49. The curriculum in the sixth form is good and includes a suitably wide range of AS- and A-level courses but relatively few other vocational courses. The school is seeking to develop its sixth-form curriculum to provide for a wide range of students: for example, a good one-year general course has been developed and is very suitable for the students taking it; it includes some vocational elements and life skills. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. The quality and quantity of resources at the school are good; the provision of teaching staff is very good. The provision of learning resources is very good in art and design, physics, chemistry, and design and technology. The library is a very good resource and has specialist facilities for post-16 students. Psychology students have unsatisfactory accommodation.
50. Students generally have good access to ICT and a range of courses to further develop their skills. The school should review its criteria for entry onto some ICT courses so that students take precisely the right course to meet their needs as this is not entirely the case now and some students do not complete their ICT course.
51. The preparation for the later stages of education and employment is very good because of the careful planning and organisation by the head of sixth form and the head of careers who co-ordinate the programme. Structured careers teaching is supported by individual interviews with personal tutors and a well-stocked careers library. A visit to a university open day is arranged for Year 12 students. Year 13 students are guided carefully through the university application procedures. More very helpful, professional advice and information is provided in the annual careers convention and the modern apprenticeship evening.
52. The school is quite appropriately exploring links with other post-16 providers with a view to collaborating and extending the current range of provision.

CARE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

This is a school with a strong, caring ethos where students' welfare, health and safety are looked after well. The house and tutorial system based across age groups works well both for offering students support and guidance and for monitoring their progress. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good procedures exist for students' care, welfare and health and safety.
- Students with special educational needs are particularly well supported.
- Students feel well supported by a trusting relationship with one or more adults in the school.
- The school operates very good induction arrangements for students new to the school.
- Sixth-form students have very good guidance on further study or career opportunities.
- There are some good strategies for seeking students' views but these need to be explained and drawn together more systematically.

Commentary

53. Students are supported by satisfactory procedures in child protection and good first aid and health and safety procedures. Staff supervise students carefully. Good procedures in the classrooms enable students to work safely. Teachers know students well and most students feel well supported by one or more adults in the school.
54. A very comprehensive programme of induction ensures that new students make a very positive transition to the school and an effective buddy system with Year 9 students further supports this. However, students have differing views on the effectiveness of the buddy system which suggests a greater degree of monitoring is required.
55. The house and tutor group structure is highly developed and works very well because it enables students to feel at home amongst a small family of students across the age range from Years 7 to 11. It is well designed for students to take responsibility, to care for one another and to

express their views. It permits regular opportunities for staff to monitor students' welfare and offer very well informed support and guidance.

56. Although students' views are sought through tutor groups and their house councils, and acted upon, the school council has yet to be effective in operating as a cohesive representational body. Action taken to harness views across the school or year groups is piecemeal.
57. The care, guidance and support of students with special educational needs is very good and a significant strength. The work of external agencies is co-ordinated well by the special educational needs co-ordinator. Well-informed assistance is available to help students with their optional subjects at the end of Year 9 to enable them to make fully informed decisions as to their future careers. Negotiation with examination boards is highly effective in that it allows these students' results to reflect their true ability.
58. Students have good access to impartial advice through careers interviews in Year 11. They are all provided with relevant literature to help them as they move from one stage of education to another. There is a good careers library in school and students can gain information and advice at the careers conventions and conferences. There is still some liaison with the Connexions service but this is being reduced.

Sixth Form

59. Students' access to support and guidance is very good. Trust between students and tutors is evident. Students appreciate the accessibility of the head of sixth form. A professional counselling service, funded by the student body, is also available.
60. Guidance for further study or careers is very good because so many opportunities are provided for students to access information, including the school's careers library and the annual careers conventions. Sixth-form tutors are generous with their time out of class.
61. In the sixth form, students' views are sought but this is not undertaken systematically. The lack of a formal representative body means students' concerns may not be acted upon by the school because these views reach management as individual opinions.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **sound** links with parents. Links with other schools, colleges and the community are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The frequency of reporting student progress is very good. Reports are good but the level of detail varies greatly between reports.
- Mechanisms for the transfer of students between stages of education are very good.
- Well-established links exist with the feeder primary schools.
- There are strong links with a number of secondary schools for joint activities.
- The school does not have a well-established system for seeking and acting on parents' views.
- Parents are not regularly invited to share in school or house celebrations of students' achievement.

Commentary

62. Information provided to parents is satisfactory overall. Parents are provided with good reports that indicate well standards attained, although the level of detail in the reports about their children's progress and targets to be achieved varies substantially. Parents, at the parents' meeting and in written comments, expressed considerable satisfaction with school reports on their children. They also praised the very good induction arrangements. Parents are well-

informed and involved in the very good mechanisms for student transfer from one phase of school life to another and beyond. Regular information about the work and day-to-day life of the school is just adequate. Some parents are uncertain about the frequency of newsletters and would like to be better informed about school events.

63. The school does not have a well-established system of consulting with parents, and valuing and acting on their views. Although a comprehensive survey was carried out in 2001 and analysed well, actions arising from this are few. A more recent survey was attempted but yielded little.
64. The school operates an open-door policy where parents can contact the school and staff at any time in theory but, in practical terms, this cannot always work and a small minority of parents does not feel that their concerns and complaints have been acted on satisfactorily.
65. Parents are generally very interested in their children's education. Attendance is high at parents' evenings and open mornings are attended well. Parents are fulsome in their praise and support for the school concerts and drama productions and cite these as real strengths in the school. Parents also indicate that they would be pleased to attend more school events but only parents of sixth-formers have been invited to attend a celebration of achievement. New arrangements for helping parents to be involved in their children's learning are good but have yet to yield results.
66. The friends association works conscientiously to raise funds for the school but only relatively few parents are involved and sums raised are not large for the size of school.
67. The school regards home/school partnership as the key to the successful achievement of students with special educational needs, and liaison with their parents is very good. Parents are fully involved in the learning of students with special educational needs, and this helps them to succeed.
68. The school has developed an impressive range of longstanding, ongoing and regular links with a broad range of organisations which significantly enhances the learning opportunities for the students involved.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good** overall. The headteacher provides very good leadership. Significant changes have been made to the senior leadership team which is developing into an increasingly effective force for school improvement. Individual members discharge their responsibilities well but the team is yet to act in a thoroughly concerted way to drive up teaching quality and standards further. Middle management is generally good, and there are some excellent role models amongst the managers of the school. School governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a clear sense of direction emanating from the governors and senior leadership team.
- The school is an effective, well-managed institution.
- The financial management of the school has improved and is now good.
- Professional development of staff is good.
- Leadership in art and design and music is inspirational.
- There has been insufficient emphasis on the monitoring and improvement of teaching and learning, but this is now being addressed soundly.
- Governors and senior managers need to ensure that all members of the school community share the vision for the future development of the school and are clear about the part they play together in achieving the desired improvements.

Commentary

69. The headteacher has a very clear commitment to maintaining and improving standards, whilst modernising aspects of the school. Key goals are to transform the management team into a leadership team and for them to take a greater role in strategic planning, and to improve teaching and learning through more effective monitoring and support for teachers in the classroom. She has already made good progress, working with an augmented senior leadership team, using their existing strengths and working with individuals and teams to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to the demands of the strategic plan.
70. Other key staff share the headteacher's vision and work hard in their own areas of responsibility to achieve the school's targets. However, the system for line management from the leadership team to the other levels of management is not yet fully effective in achieving consistency in professional standards and practices across the school. Performance data are monitored well, the information carefully analysed and areas for improvement clearly identified for whole groups of students and also for individuals. The school development plan is comprehensive, includes department plans well integrated within it, and covers key areas essential for moving the school forward. Some targets are too general, and it is not clear how evaluation will be undertaken in order to show what needs to be planned for next. Planning for improvement in subject departments is generally good at all levels, and reflects a growing facility in self-evaluation.
71. The senior leadership team has played a key role in moulding the teaching and non-teaching staff into effective teams, and in creating a conducive atmosphere in the school within which the young people can grow and develop their knowledge and understanding in all the appropriate areas of the curriculum. However, monitoring the professional work of the staff in order to provide support and to share good practice is undeveloped, although there are plans to move this issue forward.
72. The governing body plays an active role in shaping the vision of the school, particularly through the appointment of the headteacher, and through regular full governing body and sub-committee meetings. Governors have worked hard to ensure that they are familiar with their responsibilities, and they increasingly challenge the senior management of the school appropriately to ensure that this is done. They have a good understanding of the key requirements for the school to maintain current standards and to improve.
73. The leadership and management of most departments are good or very good and they are excellent in art and design and music. Provision for the induction of staff is good, ensuring that newly qualified teachers and those experienced teachers new to the school are quickly integrated. The school also makes a very positive contribution to the training of new teachers.
74. The school is well managed. Day-to-day organisation is effective. Financial management is now good. The school has a budget deficit but the plans to eliminate this are realistic, endorsed by the local education authority and still allow for the school to function properly and develop. The school's support staff make a positive contribution to the standards of the school. The overall management of specialist school initiatives is currently in the hands of the headteacher and, while this is effective in the short term, the school has correctly identified the need to appoint another member of staff to steer this work. Targets relating to specialist status have been met.
75. The school makes every effort to identify students' personal and academic needs so that each one is able to make the best of the opportunities available and to feel welcome, secure and supported in school. These efforts include the very good induction procedures, medical checks and personal support through the house, tutor and teaching arrangements.
76. The provision for students with special educational needs is well led and managed. The special educational needs co-ordinator effectively leads and manages a highly effective team of teachers and support assistants who are fully committed to including all students with special educational needs in the learning activities the school has to offer. The impressively high level

of the qualifications of special educational needs staff and the extent of their ongoing professional development are significant strengths.

Sixth Form

77. The management of the sixth form is very good because of the clear planning and direction provided by the senior sixth-form staff, supported by an efficient team of tutors. The ethos in the sixth form is very good and sixth-form students work purposefully in a very well-ordered environment.
78. The school is constantly striving to develop further its curriculum provision so that an even wider range of courses is available for the increasing student numbers; links with colleges are being considered. Some good work is undertaken to evaluate provision and outcomes but this is yet to be done systematically and thoroughly.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,565,053	Balance from previous year	-245,297
Total expenditure	4,496,306	Balance carried forward to the next	-198,550
Payment to LEA (deficit plan)	22,000		
Expenditure per student (NOR 1438)	3127		

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are very high and achievement is very good.
- Students have very good opportunities to extend their speaking and listening skills in drama, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- The subject is managed very well and this has brought about a very good level of improvement.
- Assessment is very good. Students are left in no doubt as to how they can improve their work, and their progress towards realistic targets is carefully tracked.
- The curriculum provision provides very good learning opportunities for students of all abilities, so that all are included in what the department has to offer.
- Access for all teachers and students to the impressive and sophisticated electronic aids to visual learning in use in the department is uneven.

Commentary

79. Test and examination results and current standards are above average in Year 9. In 2002, the proportion of students achieving high grades in the national tests at the end of Year 9 exceeded significantly the national average. Results this year have improved further, particularly the proportion of students attaining Level 6. On average, students exceeded their targets in English in 2003, showing a consistently good level of achievement.
80. Current standards are well above average in Years 10 and 11. The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-C in English language was significantly above the national average in 2002 and all students entered received a grade. Results have improved further this year and look likely to do so over the next two years as standards are particularly high in Year 10. The proportion of students achieving grades A*-C in English literature reached the national average in 2002, and once again it has improved in 2003. In 2003, students, overall, did better in English than in their other subjects. Girls still do better than boys, which reflects the national picture, but boys are beginning to catch up because their underachievement is being successfully targeted by the department. As a result, the gap between the performance of boys and girls is narrower than nationally. Students achieved GCSE grades in drama in 2002 which were significantly above the national average due to some very good teaching and a high standard of management. It is a strength of the leadership of the English department and the commitment of the teachers that almost all students are entered for GCSE in English literature as well as English language. Students' achievement over Years 10 and 11 is very good.
81. Drama contributes greatly to students' achievements in English. Whole-school productions are an inspirational feature of provision.
82. Students make the good overall progress that they do because teachers' performance is very well monitored and supported. This has ensured improved teaching and learning for all students. Lower attainers, including those with special educational needs, now receive extra lessons specially designed for them so that these students make the same good progress as the rest. The introduction of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy has been very well managed and the lively and well-focused lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9 have further improved standards. There are good opportunities for lower attainers to catch up, and higher attainers are routinely challenged to enable them to achieve the highest levels of which they are capable. Aspects of

visual education further enhance the learning and motivation of some students. Some younger students, for example, are enabled to interact individually with the electronic whiteboard and do so with great interest. In Year 11, a large image of Holman Hunt's 'The Awakening Conscience' displayed on the whiteboard gave students a strong insight into 'Porphyria's Lover' by Robert Browning and helped them further to understand the genre of Victorian melodrama.

83. Teaching and learning are good overall and slightly better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teachers have a very good level of knowledge and boundless enthusiasm for the subject, which they transmit to their classes. Good and interesting materials are shared and teachers work together with a common purpose. As a result, students are prepared to learn for themselves. Good class management, constructive relationships with students and good use of ICT to draft and present writing help students to do well. Access to ICT facilities is not uniformly good for all teachers and classes. Students in Years 10 and 11 build confidently on the increasingly good levels of skills and knowledge which they have gained in earlier years. Teachers prepare students very well for examination requirements. Master classes, strong international links and an electronic programme of accelerated reading raise enthusiasm and further improve learning. Assessment is very good, accurate, detailed and helps teachers to set realistic and helpful targets, so that students understand exactly what they must achieve.
84. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has initiated, supports and continues to encourage the excellent quality of teamwork seen in the department. He has a clear vision of what must be done to improve standards further. Arrangements for review and planning within the department are highly effective and have resulted in the very good level of improvement since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

85. Students' language and literacy skills are good in Years 7 to 11. Students listen carefully to the teacher and each other. They generally have good skills of oral collaboration. Students who had undertaken a study of oceans and continents in geography, for example, presented their group findings confidently to the rest of the class. Students have good opportunities to speak to a wider audience and to perform publicly in such subjects as drama and in English. As a result of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, lessons for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 address technical vocabulary well and help students to thoroughly understand concepts which are new to them. Science is an exception, where the lack of highlighted keywords is a barrier to learning. All students cope well with the written materials put before them in lessons, because they are carefully adapted to suit their needs. Students draft and present their writing in striking and original ways in their good use of ICT. Guidance for writing ranges from formal spelling lessons in English to advice on creating mind-maps, constructing paragraphs and punctuating properly in a range of subjects. In science, however, the department is aware of a need to extend students' writing to more fully explain the practical applications of the subject. Many students produce written research work of an impressively high quality. The library supports students' development in reading very well.
86. The school has made a good start to further co-ordinating provision to improve students' literacy skills in all subjects which is necessary to ensure a consistently effective approach across the curriculum. Plans for this are well advanced.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and achievement of most students is good in both French and German.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Departmental documentation is very helpful for teachers.

- Access to ICT is very limited, although there is some very good use of it.
- Teaching rooms can be uncomfortably hot or cold.

Commentary

87. Changes in the whole-school curriculum, in the options in Years 10 and 11 and a reduction in curriculum time in Year 8 have contributed to a contraction of the department since the last inspection; the number of students studying two languages has fallen. All students now take French only on entrance to the school. Students in the lower ability band have less time for their modern foreign language learning than their peers because they have more time allocated for English. On the other hand, students in the lower sets in Years 10 and 11 are now taking the written course work option of the GCSE examination and this is having a positive effect on standards of work.
88. Standards in both French and German are above the national average. In 2002, the percentage of students gaining A* and A GCSE grades in French and A* in German were over twice the national percentages but, in German, there were also high percentages of grades D and E. The 2003 GCSE results were broadly similar. There has been a significant drop in the proportion of GCSE grades A*-C in both languages since the last inspection, although the high proportion of A*-B grades has been maintained over that period. The department is taking measures to improve the grades of students in the lower sets in Years 10 and 11. Students' achievement over Years 10 and 11 is good overall.
89. Current standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and the achievement of most students is good although, in some lessons, progress is too slow as a result of unsatisfactory teaching. Higher attainers make best progress.
90. There is clear evidence of progression in the students' work. The quality and presentation of students' work in French and German are generally good, but there is some sloppy presentation and, in the case of some lower attaining students, the volume of work is low.
91. Teaching and learning are good overall and include some high-quality work but also include some shortcomings in Years 7 to 9. In some middle and lower sets, there is insufficient challenge and some muddled planning which result in some students losing interest. At its best, learning is challenging, with well-established routines and high expectations and lessons delivered at a good pace. Oral work is generally good. Teachers are good linguistic role models. In Years 10 and 11, some boys require much encouragement to achieve. In most lessons, work is pitched at an appropriate level, marking includes helpful comments about how to improve and examination technique is taught well. Mini-whiteboards are used to positive effect in all years.
92. The leadership and management of the department are very good and language teachers are provided with very good guidance and support. Formal monitoring of students' work is undertaken in the department and some assessment and target-setting procedures are helpful to students. However, these are not consistent across the department. Materials for the teaching of French and German are good and up to date. Teachers are enthusiastic and work collaboratively. They are generous with their time to students and contribute to special events such as European languages day. One specialist language room has an electronic whiteboard and very good use is made of this to engage students. Occasionally, teachers have access to a suite of computers and students derive much benefit from this and make very good progress, but this is not the case for all classes and some students miss such exciting learning. Four teaching rooms are in temporary accommodation and temperatures can be excessively cold or hot depending on the season, which has an adverse effect on learning.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students have a positive attitude to learning.
- The achievement of most of the students is good.
- The teachers are well qualified and provide good support for their students.
- Assessment of what the students have learned so that subsequent work can be pitched at the correct level for them, should be improved.
- Mathematics should more frequently be taught as a problem-solving activity, rather than a set of processes to be copied.

Commentary

93. Standards in mathematics are above average in all years. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002, the proportion of the students attaining at least the expected Level 5 or above was above average, and this result improved in 2003. In the GCSE examinations in 2002, the proportions of students gaining a grade A*-C, was above the national average and, although results were not so good in 2003, they were still better than expected for that particular cohort.
94. The achievement of the students from their entry into the school up to Year 11 is good, although there are groups of students who are underachieving. This includes some very able students who are not being challenged sufficiently, and some students in lower attaining sets in Years 10 and 11 who are insufficiently motivated by the work. The achievement is good overall because most of the students have a very good attitude to learning, and most lessons are well structured and orderly. The students with special educational needs achieve well owing to smaller classes, additional personal support from their teachers, and the support, as available, from learning support assistants.
95. The quality of teaching is good overall, although one lesson in three is only satisfactory, and one in ten is unsatisfactory. All the teachers are good mathematicians and, in most lessons, presentation of the content is precise and accurate so that the students have a clear model to follow. The teachers provide very good support to individual students. In the best lessons, the students are challenged to think and to solve problems but, in too many classrooms, mathematics is presented as a set of processes to answer standard questions, and there is not enough challenge or pace. Students' misconceptions are not always identified quickly enough.
96. Learning is good because the students have a good attitude to work, and take care and pride in the presentation of their work. They copy useful notes of topics, so that they can use them to revise, but would benefit from more opportunities to develop independent ways of taking their own notes. Most of the students work hard during the lesson, support each other well and maintain a high level of concentration on the task in hand. Many students seem more comfortable as relatively passive receivers of knowledge and understanding, and only a few actively contribute in the lessons.
97. Standards of numeracy are good overall, but students rarely check their answers by estimating, and lack flexibility in mental calculation. There are insufficient opportunities to use ICT to enhance learning.
98. The department is well organised, but leadership has been put under strain by staffing difficulties and is satisfactory. Although the department has some modern high-tech equipment, for example interactive whiteboards, it lacks some basic resources for learning that should be in every classroom. The head of department has a clear idea how to move the department forward, but recently has been unable to devote the time needed for effective

monitoring of the professional standards of the department as a whole, although she provides very good support to her colleagues where required.

99. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. It has been affected by teachers leaving, and a number of long-term absences, and the fact that the provision has not declined is a good achievement in the circumstances. There have been effective developments in the arrangements for tracking the progress of the students through a systematic testing regime. Standards have risen steadily overall in a similar way to the national rate of improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

100. Standards of numeracy are good, although the students are not always as flexible as they should be in choosing the most appropriate method for working out problems, and too many use their calculators too readily. The school has yet to establish a clear policy for teaching numeracy across the curriculum. Good applications of mathematics are found in many areas of the curriculum. In science, students have sufficient competence in measurement, graphical methods and in the manipulation of algebraic formulae to support their studies. Spatial awareness and specific techniques like enlargement and use of scales are well deployed in art and design. Further effective applications were seen during this inspection visit in many other subject areas, notably geography, design and technology and ICT.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in this successful department and reach standards that are well above average.
- The teaching team has excellent subject knowledge and is very well led.
- Teaching and learning are built upon very good relationships; teachers are extremely encouraging and engage students' interest very effectively.
- The curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of all students.
- Some very good practice exists in the use of ICT to support learning but a lack of equipment is inhibiting its spread across the whole department.
- Some laboratories and preparation rooms are in poor condition.
- Lower ability students need more help to develop their literacy skills.

Commentary

101. Results in the 2002 national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. The 2003 results improved further on those in 2002, with more students performing at the higher levels in particular. Results in the GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 were also well above the national average. The 2003 GCSE results in all of the five courses offered were an improvement compared to 2002. The three separate sciences achieved particularly good results considering the greater mix of abilities of the students taking them compared to past years, although the numbers getting A* fell considerably. Standards of work seen during the inspection are also well above average by Year 11.
102. Students' achievement in science is good. In Years 7 to 9, students are set according to their ability. Appropriate teaching methods and the teachers' high expectations of their students lead to the great majority making good progress from an average level on entry. Work seen during the inspection showed that the very good range of courses available for students in Years 10 and 11 enables them to make good progress at their own level. Students with special educational needs make equally good progress.

103. Overall, teaching and learning are very good and include some excellent, as well as satisfactory, practice. The teaching team has a great deal of subject expertise which is applied very effectively. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and the students respond and behave very well. Students enjoy the well-organised practical lessons and work well in groups. They are developing good investigative skills. Homework is used very effectively to reinforce learning but it needs to be used more to extend students' knowledge, interest and ability to communicate. Lower ability students need more help to develop their literacy skills and make more useful notes. Progress is being made with the use of ICT to support learning but a lack of equipment is inhibiting the spread of the very good practice being developed by some teachers. Assessment procedures are sound and the team is currently focusing on improving the use of assessment and feedback to students to support their progress.
104. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The considerable amount of curriculum change introduced over the past year or so has been well managed and is focused on meeting the needs of all of the students. The targets for the next stage of development are realistic. The teachers and technicians form a very committed team which makes good use of each individual's strengths and experience. Good practice is shared and discussed and there is a willingness to innovate, evaluate and improve. The department's accommodation is satisfactory but at least two laboratories are in need of refurbishment. Also, the poor condition of two of the preparation rooms makes it difficult for the laboratory technicians to work effectively in them. Laboratory equipment is satisfactory for current use but a strategy is needed for replacement of items which are getting too old. The library provides very good support for learning through its supply of project boxes for classwork and its provision for independent computer-aided learning.
105. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. High standards have been maintained. A cohesive, committed and well led science team has been developed. The curriculum has been broadened to meet the needs of all students. Progress has been made in the use of ICT to further support teaching and learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning is good overall and teachers have a very good command of the subject.
- The ICT curriculum is very good and caters for a wide range of students' needs and abilities.
- Students have good access to ICT resources outside lesson times.
- ICT is used effectively in many subjects to enhance teaching and learning.
- Very large teaching groups in Years 7 to 9 limit the level of support which teachers can offer to individuals.

Commentary

106. In all years from Years 7 to 11, students have timetabled ICT lessons and other opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills and knowledge. This very good curricular provision has resulted in students attaining standards that are above average in Years 7 to 9 and average for students, taken as a whole, in Years 10 and 11.
107. Between the different teaching sets in Years 7 to 9, based upon students' ability in mathematics, standards range from below average to well above average. Students are making good progress following the National ICT Strategy despite the very large teaching groups, some with over 30 students working independently at computers. This size of groups limits the range of teaching strategies and the level of support which teachers can offer to individuals to meet their specific needs.

108. In Years 10 and 11, students follow a wide range of accredited courses, the principle ones being the short course GCSE and GNVQ at intermediate level. Standards are average overall. However, there are many strong candidates taking GCSE and much very good work was seen in the GNVQ course. Between 30 and 40 students take a GCSE in ICT. Results have been consistently above average for both A*-C and A*-G grades for some years up to and including 2002. In 2003, a group of the most able students took GNVQ ICT and attained excellent results with the equivalent of 94 per cent A*-C. The introduction of this new course resulted in a fall in the higher grades among the now smaller GCSE group. Most other students in Year 11 achieve an award in a CLAIT computer skills course. Students as a whole achieve well in ICT over Years 10 and 11.
109. Teaching and learning are good overall and, in some lessons, they are of high quality. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. In Years 10 and 11, students understand very well what they need to do to improve because teaching and the course structures assist them in this. Students have a very positive attitude to their work in ICT. They are keen to make progress and their use of ICT facilities outside lesson times is good, particularly in the library with good assistance from library staff.
110. The leadership and management of ICT are good. Resources are good and the well-managed ICT support team is very effective in ensuring that equipment is reliable. Overall improvement in ICT provision since the last inspection is good; standards have risen, facilities have improved and the effective use of ICT has grown considerably across the curriculum.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

111. Students' competence in ICT is good. In all years, students have timetabled ICT lessons and other opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills and knowledge. From Year 10 onwards, they follow an accredited course at appropriate levels up to GCE A-level. Standards are at least consistent with national expectations and often above expectations.
112. The school has focused on the development of ICT to improve students' achievement. There are good examples of the use of ICT, especially word-processing and presentation software, for GCSE coursework, where students are able to use their ICT independently. The Internet is used well for research and students are able to refine their searches to find the appropriate information.
113. The use of ICT is evident in the work of some teachers or departments; in others, it is still in the process of being developed. Overall, the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning in subjects across the curriculum is good. It is very good in some departments, most notably in geography, and also in food technology, music, business education and art and design. The use of computer-aided manufacturing needs to develop further in design and technology and greater use should be made of the computers in the mathematics department. In some French lessons, students are able to use ICT independently at a number of tasks to develop writing skills and enlarge vocabulary. The measurement and control elements of ICT take place in science and design and technology. There is very effective use of ICT in science to clarify classification of materials, using pH probes for example. The history department has an excellent website, but it is underused, although students know about it. Specific software is used in English, mathematics and business studies to raise standards.
114. Interactive whiteboards are used very effectively in many subjects. There are currently 13, so that access for all staff is limited in this large school. Some teachers have developed well their skills in the use of these whiteboards; others lack confidence.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average overall.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic and committed.
- Teachers' use of ICT is very good.
- Systematic processes to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning have yet to be implemented.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent.
- Support for the development of the literacy skills of lower attaining students is insufficient.

Commentary

115. In 2002, at the end of Year 11, all students secured a GCSE pass grade and nearly two-thirds gained passes at the higher grades A*-C; this is broadly similar to the national average. The standards achieved by girls are higher than those of boys.
116. Standards in the current Year 9 are well above average. This represents good achievement for many students in relation to when they started at the school in Year 7, including those students with special educational needs. Students of all abilities demonstrate increasingly good factual knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. They acquire a good range of skills in map work and can undertake geographical enquiries well. Numeracy and ICT skills are used effectively. Written work of most students is good and it is well supported with guidance on planning and paragraph structure. However, there is insufficient support for the lower attaining students and their writing remains a weakness.
117. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This represents good achievement by students who opt for geography. Coursework is very good. Students are able to plan their work effectively and produce well-structured assignments which show very good use and application of geographical skills and techniques. The use of ICT is a good feature of their work.
118. The quality of teaching and learning in geography is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of effective approaches in the classroom. In Years 7 and 8, good teaching and high-quality resources promote well students' development of map skills and field sketching, for example. Very effective use is made of ICT to support students' learning. Overall assessment is good but there are inconsistencies in how students' work is marked and often there is too little guidance in their books on what they need to do to improve. Relationships in the classroom are good and students display positive attitudes to their work.
119. The leadership of geography is good. Strong departmental teamwork is helping to raise standards. Teaching staff are very well qualified. Accommodation and learning resources are of good quality and meet the needs of the curriculum well. The curriculum is broadened through fieldwork. Good use is made of performance data to set targets and to plan work. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching exist but are not yet being used systematically.
120. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, most notably with the development of assessment processes and the use of ICT.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently above the national average.
- Teaching is good, confident and well informed.
- Departmental leadership and management are very good.
- Students are exposed to and discuss historical controversy but not often enough.
- Monitoring of teaching takes place but could be strengthened further.

Commentary

121. In 2002, teachers' assessments indicated that the proportion of students attaining Level 5 and above at the end of Year 9 was well above the national average. GCSE results in 2002 were above the national average. In 2003, the examination results were higher than those in 2002 but there was a decline in the number of students attaining A*.
122. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement for many students from entry to the school. The emphasis on literacy promotes good progress. Lower attaining Year 9 students understand that primary sources may be biased. Higher attaining students in Year 8 produce very good pieces of extended writing on the causes of 15th century poverty, for example. Students with special educational needs make progress in line with other groups. Teachers know their individual needs but some demand more attention than an unsupported teacher can provide. Most learn well in the calm and orderly atmosphere which prevails in most lessons.
123. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This represents good achievement. Students' historical skills are developing well. Year 11 students are able to evaluate political skills, for example. Others analyse political motives underlying inflammatory speeches.
124. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. A mixture of experienced and newly appointed teachers, all well qualified and with very good subject knowledge, make up a good teaching team. In many lessons, energetic teaching, keen questioning and varied activities ensure that all students are kept involved, their attention held and their concentration sustained. Usually, students respond well to their teachers' high expectations. Carefully- planned lessons mean that they learn to work to time but are not put under undue pressure. The respect given to students' opinions gives them confidence to join in class discussion. Students feel secure. In most classes, there is a pleasant working atmosphere.
125. The leadership of the department is very good. Improvement since the previous inspection is good because of good management and planning. Assessment procedures are now carefully used to the academic benefit of students. ICT is accessible to both teachers and students; the history department has an excellent website which could be used more. The history department is progressive and receptive to change, committed to the improvement of students' academic performance and to ensuring their enjoyment of the subject.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good and the teaching team is committed to raising standards.
- The curriculum is well planned with an increasing range of good learning activities.
- The contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- There is a need for a more consistent understanding of standards across the department.
- The learning needs of lower attaining students are not always addressed.
- The use of ICT is limited and there are some shortages of textbooks.

Commentary

126. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement for most students. They can identify questions about life and its meaning and participate confidently in discussion. As they move through Years 7 to 9, students develop a good understanding of religious ideas and become more reflective on their own experience and the experience of others. Lower attaining students struggle at times with the ideas and tasks.
127. GCSE short course results are in line with national averages. This represents a downward trend from previous years when small numbers of students were entered. In 2003, for the first time, the majority of students were entered for the examination.
128. Standards in Year 11 are currently above average and most students achieve well. They develop their evaluative skills well and can apply religious teachings to the impact they have on the everyday lives of believers. During the inspection, Year 10 students' understanding of the importance of Christian marriage vows was greatly enhanced by the role-play of the ceremony which was conducted by a local vicar.
129. The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. Features of the best lessons are clear aims, effective questioning and a strong focus on the skills in the subject. Brisk pace and variety of approaches in the lesson ensure that most students are engaged in tasks and sustain concentration. Weaker elements in teaching are the lack of a shared understanding of expectations in the subject which leads to some inconsistency in the marking and feedback to students. Resources are satisfactory, the greatest need being for a wider range of textbooks at Key Stage 3. Insufficient use is currently being made of ICT across the department.
130. The leadership of the department is very good and beginning to have an impact on standards. Teamwork and commitment are strong. The curriculum is well balanced and the subject is brought alive by visitors such as the Sikh team from Birmingham and the visit to Coventry Cathedral. Good displays create a good learning environment, although the lack of a subject office creates difficulty for the organisation of learning.
131. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. New staff appointed in the last two years have made a significant difference to the quality of religious education. The subject has great potential for further improvement.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are above the national average and rising.
- The use of ICT in the coursework folders for Years 10 and 11 is good, with excellent examples in food technology.
- There is good teaching in most lessons and good relationships.
- Very good leadership and management provide a very clear sense of purpose and direction and are supported by good teamwork.
- The tasks set for lower attainers in Years 7 to 9 are not always suitably challenging.
- Marking in Years 7 to 9 is inconsistent and students are not always fully aware of their National Curriculum levels or what they need to do to improve.
- Students' experience in programming a machine to manufacture a product is underdeveloped.

Commentary

132. GCSE results are above the national average, although the numbers entered in 2002 fell considerably short of the full Key Stage 4 cohort and this makes comparisons with national averages less secure.
133. Standards in Year 9 are in line with national expectations. This represents good achievement, including for those students with special educational needs. Most students understand a design brief and can effectively produce a range of design solutions, guided by their teachers. Practical skills are good apart from those of lower attaining students who do not always finish their work well.
134. Across all material areas, standards in Year 11 are above average which represents good achievement. Higher attaining students are able to design and make products based on the criteria set and the most gifted students produce imaginative and interesting solutions and very good products. They modify existing products well in food technology and have a good understanding of chemical and nutritional values. The relative weakness in the work of lower attaining students is their failure to complete their coursework on time and to present their work effectively. Weak graphical communication skills also feature in lower attaining students' work. Higher attaining students have good presentation skills and, more often than not, very good graphical communication skills. In food technology, students use the computer very well to produce high-quality coursework.
135. The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology is good. In the most effective lessons, the teachers' precise questions force students to think through and explain their ideas more carefully. The weakness in teaching is where teachers allow too much time for students to complete a task, occasionally slowing down the pace of learning too much. In Years 7 to 9, teachers do not always match effectively the demands of the work to the abilities of lower attaining students. Marking is too often inconsistent and does not always reflect clearly what students need to do to improve their work. Very good use is made of ICT by students to complete coursework in Years 10 and 11 but an opportunity for students to programme a machine to produce a product is underdeveloped in all years.
136. The leadership of design and technology is very good. The development plan is very well prioritised, successfully resolving the issues identified in the previous report in a logical and manageable order. The management of the changes required for improved provision is very good and standards overall have greatly improved. Monitoring of lessons takes place; it is not yet undertaken routinely, although a more formal structure is planned. Best practice is

sometimes shared. Group sizes in Years 7 to 9 are large and have a negative impact on learning. Good teaching minimizes the potential health and safety risks of large teaching groups. Technical support is of a high quality and greatly helps raise standards, although the technical support time for food technology is insufficient.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are significantly above the national average.
- The use of sketchbooks for research and development in Years 10 and 11 is excellent.
- Assessment is thorough and the support given matches students' needs.
- In some lessons, group sizes are too large for the wide range of art experiences provided.
- Further development is needed in the use of ICT throughout the department.

Commentary

137. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2002 was significantly above the national average. Although boys perform less well than girls, their scores are still well above the national average, with rising trends in recent results. The picture of above average GCSE attainment has been maintained in recent years. For students in Year 9, teacher assessment in 2002 showed attainment to be well above the national average.
138. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. There is no significant difference between boys and girls. Students' achievements over Years 7 to 9 are good in relation to their knowledge, understanding and skills when they entered the school, which were average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good and students' attitudes to learning are very positive. Lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Students are able to use line, tone and texture effectively in their drawings. They draw well from direct observation and understand three-dimensional concepts. Work shows greater perceptual depth when students use first-hand observation as a basis for study. The department is committed to improving standards of literacy and teachers make very good use of key words and annotation in sketchbooks. Numeracy skills are being used to analyse basic proportions. Students are able to explore ideas and access visual information, including images from different historical and cultural contexts.
139. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average. This is a direct result of very good assessment procedures that ensure students have opportunities to discuss their achievements and set targets for future development. Achievement by Year 11 is very good because of the teachers' enthusiasm and very good preparation of different levels of work which challenges all students. The excellent range of opportunities, using many art media, and development of personal interests have had a positive impact on boys' achievement since the last inspection. Sketchbooks are well annotated and students are able to show some influence of important movements in art and design or of particular artists.
140. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall; it is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The difference between the groups is mostly explained by teachers using a greater range of teaching strategies and making better use of homework with the older students. Although improvement in the use of ICT since the last inspection has been good, its full potential as a learning aid has not been fully developed, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are very committed, caring and supportive of students in their charge. They use their excellent knowledge and expertise to very good effect and lesson preparation is very good at all stages. Teachers make very good use of praise to encourage the participation of students of all abilities, and good use of question and answer ensures that all students are actively involved. In

Years 7 to 9, clear assessment objectives, based on the expected levels of attainment for National Curriculum art and design, which are shared with all students, lend rigour to ongoing assessment and authority to end-of-year assessment.

141. The leadership of art and design is excellent. The teachers work very well as a team and give freely of their time to students, which extends learning. Staff bring a broad and varied range of experience to the subject and departmental meetings are used to share ideas and good practice. Visits to galleries and the use of artists in residence help to increase the quality and range of students' work and support their spiritual and cultural development. Students' art work enhances a great many areas around the school and leaves a visitor in no doubt about the strengths of the art and design department and the fact that the school is a visual arts specialist college.
142. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good as a result of very good teaching, which is well structured and challenges students, and inspiring leadership.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have been consistently well above the national average for a number of years.
- Music is a major feature of the school's positive image in the community.
- Extra-curricular work is wide ranging and of high quality.
- Music technology is used very effectively as a composition tool.
- There is insufficient, appropriate sequencing software for less able students.
- Apart from the school hall, there is no other suitable large space for rehearsals or large groups.

Commentary

143. Music plays a huge and valuable part in school life. Standards are above average overall. Teacher assessments show that a higher than average proportion of students reaches Level 5 or above by the end of Year 9. GCSE results at grades A*-C and average point scores are consistently well above the national average, although numbers entered are small. In 2003, five students took their GCSE examination in Year 10 after one year of study outside normal timetabled lesson time and all obtained high grades.
144. Students enter the school with average levels of attainment, although some have above average playing skills which are immediately harnessed by the school. The excellence in technology ensures good progress, and achievement is good from the start for most students. More appropriate software would enable less able students to share this level of achievement; their achievement is generally satisfactory.
145. Above average standards are particularly clear in computer-based composition from Year 7 onwards, where a significant proportion of students shows excellence both in the use of the technology and in the quality of music produced. Older students not only make and store their compositions in the computer memory, but also make good-quality recordings of the same pieces using the instruments for which they were composed. It is thus not surprising that students gain such high grades.
146. Teaching and learning are very good overall; they are good in Years 7 to 9, and very good with older students. High-quality relationships give a sense of security, and planning and preparation ensure that students know where they are going. All topics are clearly linked to attainment target levels and criteria, and the focus on individual development ensures that students gain skills, knowledge, understanding and aural awareness. In the best work, there is clearly

progressive refinement in musical activities.

147. Leadership is inspirational, with very clear vision and high aspirations. The excitement with, and passion for, music are clearly communicated. Management is very efficient and effective. The focus of the good curriculum is in technology and composition, but world music and mainstream music are also important elements. Assessment is good, but could be refined further by increasing student self-assessment and by using their evaluations to influence subsequent work. The contribution music makes to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, and students are inspired by musical experiences of all kinds.
148. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. Provision for ICT is the highlight, although appropriate sequencing-based software for the less able is not yet in place. The issue is on the department development plan, and a number of options are currently being investigated.
149. Nearly a fifth of the school's students take part in the wide variety of good-quality performing ensembles, as well as regular school musicals. Just under a tenth of students have instrumental lessons. These are impressive figures and exemplify the commitment of staff and students to the musical life of the school.

The use of ICT as a composition tool in music

The music department's use of the 'Sibelius' software as a composing tool is exemplary for the vast majority of students. Excellent work was seen and heard in Years 7 to 9, with effective compositions of increasing complexity. Some of the jazz-style compositions were exciting and vital, and the whole-tone work in Year 8 was thoroughly evocative.

Excellent practice was seen and heard at GCSE and post-16 levels. Students composed their pieces using the technology. It was clear that they were hearing what they were writing in their own aural imagination, since music was stylistically right for the instruments concerned. Subsequently, compositions were printed out and a live performance recorded, when greater musical subtlety became a reality.

There is no doubt that the technology speeds up the composition process and is used in the department to improve achievement significantly and enable students to access each other's compositions. The department provides excellent examples of music technology being used exceptionally well to develop a great many music skills.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently high.
- The improved quality of the curriculum meets the interests of the students and has raised participation rates and standards in lessons for girls.
- The extra-curricular programme is very good and standards reached in competitive sport are very high.
- The range of tasks to challenge all levels of attainment within lessons should be extended.
- Greater involvement should be expected of those students who are unable to participate physically in lessons.

Commentary

150. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average. Results in 2003 were slightly lower but still above the national average figures for 2002.
151. The school does not have records of students' attainment in physical education on entry to the school. Standards in Year 9 are average. A minority of students reaches above average standards and shows advanced skills in gymnastics and games such as basketball, hockey and netball. Students understand how to use tactics and strategies in order to outwit their opponent. They are able to evaluate their own performance and that of others accurately and are confident in using technical vocabulary.
152. Standards reached by students in Year 11 are average. The girls, in particular, have a good attitude towards physical activity and understand the importance of exercise for a healthy lifestyle. The students who are following the GCSE course are working at an above average standard. They make good use of their general knowledge in related topics, and reason through answers intelligently. Their notes are well written and are a good resource for revision. Most students, including those from minority ethnic groups, achieve well in all years. They respond well to the high level of challenge and practise hard in order to improve their skills. Those with special educational needs are often talented sports players. Their success in the subject adds to their self-esteem.
153. The popular extra-curricular programme provides students with a very wide range of activities to further their interests. The 'sport for all' approach encourages students of all abilities to participate and also join clubs in the community. Individuals and teams enjoy success at school, district, county and national levels in sports such as athletics, basketball, football, swimming and hockey.
154. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is good in all years. All of the teachers have high expectations of the quality and pace of the students' work, standards of behaviour and good sporting attitudes. They have good knowledge of the activities they teach and use demonstration effectively to highlight good performance so that students know what to aim for. The pace of learning is always brisk and clear teaching and learning objectives are met. The GCSE course is effectively organised and the teachers are well informed of examination requirements. The range of tasks in theoretical aspects does not always fully extend the most able or meet the needs of the lower attaining students. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented achieve well in practical lessons because they are challenged by appropriate tasks. A strength of the teaching is the way teachers plan to develop students' literacy skills. However, planning for the development of numeracy and ICT skills is not as effective. Those students who are unable to take part in lessons are not always given tasks to involve them closely in what is being taught or included in question and answer sessions.
155. Good leadership of the department has ensured that the curriculum has been developed to increase girls' interest and participation in lessons. Formal monitoring has yet to be established. Clear vision and direction is provided for the staff. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards have been improved in core lessons and new assessment procedures are in place to ensure consistent judgements on standards.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Some lessons in personal, social and health education were sampled. Provision is good overall. There is a well structured and resourced programme of topics, taught mainly by an experienced and committed team of staff. The programme includes good provision for careers education, relationships and sex education and for teaching about alcohol and drug abuse. There are very good links with community groups and agencies, including the police. Since the last inspection, there have been good improvements in the programme, the organisation and the quality of teaching.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory** and developing well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership is raising staff awareness of requirements and standards in citizenship.
- A wide range of opportunities exists for students to participate in, and contribute to, school and community activities.
- Assessment of achievement in citizenship has not yet been sufficiently developed.
- Monitoring and evaluation are currently insufficient to ensure that citizenship is being taught effectively in all subjects as planned.

Commentary

156. Students reach average standards overall and their achievement is sound. In subjects where the citizenship aims are clear and activities are well planned, standards attained are above average. There are good gains in areas such as PSHE, science, religious education, geography, history and English. As students move through the school, skills of enquiry and communication are well developed. This was demonstrated in a Year 11 lesson on the issue of refugees and asylum where students reflected on new insights gained. Most students are confident in discussion.
157. A very good range of opportunities beyond lessons is offered to students to develop their skills. These are very inclusive in scope and nature. Through them, students learn to act responsibly and to take account of the needs of the group as well as themselves. Examples include the Year 9 camp, the focus on research and planning for charity events, the house festivals and the house and school councils.
158. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Most teachers are aware of how their subject contributes to promoting the skills and knowledge in citizenship. The use of a specific stamp on students' work helps them recognise that they have been working towards citizenship aims. This was demonstrated in a Year 8 science lesson where students worked in a local arboretum, analysing community needs and environmental concerns. Weaknesses in teaching and learning relate to the assessment of students' progress in citizenship. This is at an early stage of development in some subjects, where students are not clear about what constitutes citizenship and what they need to do to improve.
159. Leadership is very good. There is a clear understanding of the needs of the subject and the next stages of development. Strategies for improvements in the assessment and recording of students' progress have been identified. There is a strong team delivering the citizenship aspects of PSHE, using a good range of approaches and links with the community. A thorough audit has been undertaken to identify how the requirements of the subject can be met across the curriculum. The next stage of development for this subject is to devise mechanisms through which the school can be sure that all subjects are contributing to citizenship as intended.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The tables below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. Some performance information is not available because the small numbers of students from the school taking the course do not permit valid statistical comparisons.

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
2002	2002						
Art and design	42	87.6	85.1	47.6	48.7	87.6	87.6
Biology	36	100.0	91.6	33.3	36.3	82.2	74.1
Business studies	15	100.0	96.4	13.3	32.8	70.7	76.5
Chemistry	18	100.0	81.1	77.8	45.9	100.0	81.1
Drama	7	100.0	98.1	42.9	41.5	80.0	82.9
Design and technology	8	87.5	95.3	12.5	35.5	67.5	76.5
English literature	32	100	98.5	53.1	43.7	89.4	84.3
Geography	21	100.0	97.1	4.8	40.5	67.6	80.9
History	22	100.0	97.1	27.3	41.0	75.5	81.2
ICT	8	100.0	89.1	37.5	22.4	77.5	64.1
Languages	6	100	98	50	46	83.3	84.0
Mathematics	20	100.0	93.3	50.0	52.2	87.0	84.7
Other social studies	20	95.0	94.3	30.0	38.9	76.0	77.7
Physics	11	100.0	92.8	72.7	42.8	90.9	78.6
Religious studies	6	100.0	96.3	0.0	44.0	70.0	82.2
Sports / PE studies	12	83.3	73.2	33.3	29.5	83.3	73.2

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	23	82.6	90.0	47.8	42.7	37.4	39.0
Biology	12	66.7	81.6	16.7	33.2	22.5	33.2
Chemistry	7	100.0	84.8	14.3	36.9	30.0	35.2
English literature	9	100.0	94.4	22.2	37.9	37.8	34.0
Geography	10	100.0	88.3	20.0	36.4	34.0	36.3
History	14	100.0	91.8	7.1	37.2	31.4	37.8
Languages	6	83	85	17	23	25.0	31.1
Mathematics	7	71.4	74.2	14.3	34.3	24.3	31.3

Other social studies	22	86.4	83.2	0.0	32.5	23.2	33.6
Physics	6	100.0	82.0	33.3	36.2	38.3	34.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are enabled to achieve well and secure above average standards in examinations.
- Reflective teaching by expert staff engages students in understanding the learning process.
- Leadership is excellent and management very good.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

160. The impressive array of portraits of famous authors, painted by students, that lines the English corridor, raises expectations about a literary ethos that is admirably met. The department is committed to continuous improvement and has made good progress since the previous inspection.
161. Standards are currently well above average at AS- and A-level. The work of the most able students frequently contains highly perceptive insights into a wide range of literature. Students listen well. In speaking, however, their use of critical terms is not always as good as in their writing.
162. Examination results were above average at A-level in 2002, when the pass rate was 100 per cent and over half of students obtained the high A or B grades. In 2003, the 100 per cent pass rate was maintained and two-thirds of students obtained A or B grades, maintaining the rising trend in such performance over the last three years. AS-level results were above average in 2002, with a 100 per cent pass rate; 2003 results are similar. Given the students' wide ability range at the start of this popular option, these results represent very good overall achievement.
163. Teaching and learning are very good. Learning benefits from the keen co-operation of students with their peers and excellent relationships with teachers. Relatively less able students gain enormously from teachers and peers. The most able, however, are not always stretched to their utmost potential. All students assiduously annotate their texts. They benefit greatly from teachers' high levels of experience and expertise. Questioning by teachers focuses learning on texts and the use of language. Lessons are well planned, with opportunities to work in sub-groups as well as a whole class. Assessment criteria are explicit so that students know exactly what to do. Teachers often discuss the process of note taking or responding so that students have a firm grasp of the learning they engage in. Carefully thought-out approaches supply a structure that guides students as they build their knowledge from extracts and notes to essays and a view of the whole text. The transition from GCSE to studying the most demanding texts is made gradually. Students were seen to cope with subtle writing in 'The Remains of the Day', treating ambiguity as richness, rather than confusion. Very good resources created by the department provide a synoptic view of the work in its context. The department invites students to participate in challenging research through the school Intranet and the worldwide Internet and also runs and monitors a very good scheme of short-term loans of critical texts with the library.
164. Leadership of post-16 English is excellent, sustaining commitment to developing further literary studies in students and staff. Management of syllabus and course deadlines and of improving resources to support teaching and learning is very good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

165. Students' language and literacy skills are very good in the sixth form. In many subjects, students are given very good opportunities to give presentations of their work and do so most competently and often in very imaginative and inventive ways. Students' note-taking skills are mostly very good. The quality of written research is an impressive feature of students' work.

Modern foreign languages

The focus was on A-level French. German was sampled. The standards seen in German were high, with some very motivated students and very good teaching providing a very good model of spoken language. Too few students have taken German over recent years to enable a meaningful interpretation of results and trends to be made.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good because lessons are so interesting and challenging.
- Assessment of students' written and oral work is of high quality and this encourages students to achieve very well.
- Students would benefit from opportunities to use French abroad and from having a foreign language assistant.

Commentary

166. Only small numbers of students have taken A-level French in recent years and the number went down significantly since the last inspection to only three candidates in 2002; the number has increased for 2003. Numbers starting the AS-level courses over the last two years also indicate that the previous downward trend in A-level entries is in the process of being reversed.
167. In 2002, all three students passed A-level French, two with high grades. The results for the three candidates in 2003 were even better than those in 2002. The school's analysis of 2003 results in AS-level French shows that students did not achieve as well in French as in their other subjects. Based on current work seen, students are making good progress, some from a relatively weak GCSE base, and achieving very well. Students work purposefully and have good language-learning routines. For example, they note vocabulary without being asked so that the flow of the lesson is not disturbed. In one lesson, students were able to talk about the homeless in French using a sophisticated range of vocabulary and with good accents. Students use role-play opportunities effectively and speak with confidence.
168. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is confident and teachers show very good subject knowledge. Lessons have very good pace and challenge and demand students' active participation. Difficult topics are made interesting with a variety of tasks and a range of methodologies being used that sustain students' motivation. Significant emphasis is given to oral work so that students are prepared very well for the oral examinations. Where there are errors, the teacher assists sensitively and corrections are quickly learnt. Teaching successfully instils confidence in students and encourages them through careful marking of work. Materials used for the teaching of French are up to date and interesting to the students. Classrooms contain displays of language-based materials that promote well the practical use of languages, in a business context for example. Students have a wide exposure to different aspects of French culture and society. Homework is used very well to reinforce work covered in lessons.
169. Subject leadership is very good. Clear thinking about the nature of the course and materials enables teachers to work with confidence and deliver purposeful lessons. Groups are shared between teachers, and curriculum planning is carefully done to ensure good continuity

in learning, helpful common routines and positive attitudes. This clarity of purpose and high-quality planning contribute greatly to students' very good achievement.

MATHEMATICS

Further mathematics was sampled. Only a few candidates enter for further mathematics each year. The 2003 further mathematics GCE A-level results were well above the national average with three of the four candidates attaining an A grade.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A-level are above average.
- Students' use of ICT in mathematics is very good in Year 13.
- Opportunities to study a variety of mathematics modules are very good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good. They have a positive effect on learning.
- The departmental marking policy should be reviewed as it is currently unsatisfactory.

Commentary

170. Standards in A-level mathematics have improved since the last inspection when results were in line with national averages. After a dip in 2001, results in 2002 were above national averages and those in 2003 show further improvement with two-thirds of students obtaining A or B grades. In the AS-level examinations, results were above average in 2002. AS-level results in 2003 were higher than those in 2002. Over half the students have gained a grade A or B at AS-level in the last three years. Girls have consistently outperformed boys over a number of years, having significantly higher proportions attaining A or B grades. There have been higher proportions of weaker male candidates despite sound advice on the requisite standards before embarking on a post-16 course in mathematics.
171. Current standards in Year 13 are above average and represent good achievement. Students' facility with algebraic manipulation, trigonometry and the understanding of calculus are all of a good A-level standard. Students in Year 13 have developed very good skills in the use of ICT. An example of these competencies was the variety of students' presentations of their homework based on the display of cartoons involving circles and associated algebra. Some had produced their work on graphic calculators, others in the form of computer printouts, and yet others downloaded from the school net to display on the interactive whiteboard.
172. The observed standards in Year 12, early into the AS-level course, are at least average. All students are confident in algebraic manipulation and mathematical modelling, whether statistical or mechanical. The more able students have quickly grasped some of the more difficult concepts associated with vector algebra and all are able to pose hypotheses and then test them.
173. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are satisfactory in some lessons and elsewhere very good, particularly when students are encouraged to generalise processes for themselves and develop their own strategies and techniques. In some lessons, teachers and students are confident in the use of the interactive whiteboard and employ it very effectively to explain mathematical concepts and techniques. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and pose challenging questions; ones that are open-ended rather than merely expecting a brief response. Correct mathematical vocabulary is insisted upon. Teachers explain skillfully the implications of a particular concept or process. Expositions are delivered with enthusiasm and the students respond well. Students have developed the confidence to question without inhibitions and seek clarification so that they assimilate new concepts well.

174. The department is well organised and led. The head of department has begun to analyse carefully students' achievement from GCSE through AS- to A-level and set individual targets. The curriculum offered includes a very comprehensive set of pathways of mathematics options and combinations. Students appreciate this choice. The departmental marking policy encourages students to mark their own work and annotate it with a note requesting support as required. Teachers periodically check students' work and then orally supply the requested support. Written comments on how students might improve their work are rare. Whilst this policy helps to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, it has tended to result in misconceptions and errors in logical proofs of algebraic and trigonometrical identities, for example, being overlooked and not acted upon and this is unsatisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

175. Students' competence in mathematics is good. Students are able to use their numerical skills confidently, making good approximations or estimations where these are required. They use their good calculating skills in chemistry and physics. Skills in drawing and interpreting graphs are good and were seen being used very well in a Year 13 economics lesson. In a subject such as physics, the department provides additional lessons for those students who do not take AS-level mathematics to enable them to reach necessary competencies in mathematics for work in physics.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is very good and standards in all three subjects of biology, chemistry and physics have been either well above average or above average for the last four years. The focus was on chemistry and physics.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are above national averages at both AS- and A-level.
- Good teaching leads to good learning and achievement.
- The chemistry course studied is very effective in motivating students and presenting industrial applications.
- The policy relating to taking an examination soon after the completion of a module of study, which is currently not possible, should be reviewed.

Commentary

176. Although there is some variation from year to year, overall results at both AS- and A-level are above the national average. A-level results in 2003 were nearer to the national average but from students with a wider range of ability than is normal. Chemistry is a very popular subject with two groups of about 20 students in Year 12 and one group of about 20 students in Year 13. Chemistry is a very cost effective subject in the sixth form. The number of students who have opted not to continue to study chemistry in Year 13 is relatively low.

177. The standard of work seen is above average. Students have high levels of mathematics, which enable them to cope well with the calculations required for chemistry. For example, Year 12 students had no difficulty in working out enthalpy changes using bond energy values. By Year 13, students have well-developed laboratory skills. They use these skills very successfully, whether investigating the properties of amines and amino acids or hydrolysing a peptide. The quality of the investigations is outstanding with students demonstrating well above expected self-study and ICT skills. Students are set high standards for their written work and, consequently, have accurate records from which to revise.

178. Students generally achieve well in relation to their performance at GCSE. The most able students obtain grades A or B at A-level. For compelling reasons, minimum standards for entry onto the course are not always adhered to. Consequently, some students achieve well by gaining any pass at A-level.
179. The quality of teaching is good. Students learn well because the teachers use very challenging questioning techniques. The teachers use the Salters chemistry course, which illustrates very effectively the industrial applications of chemistry. Students have excellent relationships with each other and their teachers. Consequently, there is a very purposeful working atmosphere in the classroom.
180. The head of department has good leadership and management skills. He is working closely with his colleague to ensure that the courses are well planned. The teachers wish to enter Year 12 students for their first module test at the earliest opportunity. They are not allowed to do so because of a school policy; this limits the extent to which the modular arrangements can be used to enable students to have their achievements recognised through an early examination.
181. Since the last inspection, the department has made the following very good improvements: the number of students opting for chemistry has increased; considerable improvement has been made in the provision of ICT but there are still insufficient computers; students now show exceptionally high levels of interest.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at both AS- and A-level are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The curriculum is very good, captures students' interest and contributes to their exceptionally good attitudes to work.
- The additional lesson for students not taking mathematics should be planned for greater coherence with the AS-level physics course.
- Access to computers should be improved.
- The policy relating to taking modular examinations soon after the course of study, which is currently not possible, should be reviewed.

Commentary

182. Students' results at both AS- and A-level were well above the national average in 2002 and the 2003 results are similar. The Year 12 group is larger than ideal at around 20 students. Physics is a very cost effective subject in the sixth form.
183. The standard of current work is well above average. Students have high levels of mathematical skills, which enable them to cope well with physics calculations. Year 12 students demonstrate well above expected laboratory skills when measuring the internal resistance of cells, for example. The physics course followed encourages students to develop their independent study skills through the industrial visit and the coursework investigations. The reports from the students on these two aspects are of an exceptionally high standard.
184. Students achieve well both in terms of the school's target grades and in relation to their attainment in physics at GCSE. Key to this success is the solid foundation gained by the students at GCSE in both physics and mathematics. Another factor is students' outstanding attitudes to their work.

185. The quality of teaching is good and students learn well. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use effective questioning techniques, which make the students think about and discuss the topic very carefully. This was evident in Year 13 students' lessons on capacitors and in Year 12 students' work on the equation of motion. The department makes some limited special provision for the gifted and talented students by providing them with extension work.
186. The head of department displays good leadership and management skills. He works closely with his colleagues so that the courses are well planned and constitute a very good curriculum. One reason for the success of the department is the use of the Salters physics course for which the school was a pilot school. The course focuses on the applications of physics and this captures so very effectively students' interests. A school policy restricts early entry for the modular examinations, although the physics teachers would like to enter Year 12 students for their first module test at the earliest opportunity and students appear to be capable of doing so. An additional mathematics lesson is provided for those physics students who do not take their mathematics beyond GCSE but this is not fully effective; it is imperative to work out an exact teaching programme so that this matches the teaching sequence of the physics course.
187. Since the last inspection, improvement has been very good. Standards have risen. Considerable progress has been made in the provision for ICT. However, there are insufficient computers for students to download promptly the experimental data captured. There is now, without doubt, sufficient variety in teaching and learning styles to maintain students' interests.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology was sampled. A-level ICT was examined for the first time in 2001 and results were well above the national average. Results in 2002 were above average. The 2003 results are lower than those in 2002. There were no higher grades this year and the course was inappropriate for a number of candidates who did not complete it. The school should review its entry criteria for advanced ICT courses.

Students' competence in ICT across the curriculum is good. Overall, current standards seen in AS- and A-level lessons were average and there was evidence of some good work in students' portfolios. In ICT key skills lessons at Levels 1 and 2, and for some students following CLAIT skills courses, standards were at least satisfactory for the level of course being followed. Teaching and learning are good overall.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography and psychology. History was sampled and very good teaching was seen; standards in history have fluctuated in recent years and are generally above average.

The school now provides religious education for all students in the sixth form. The philosophy and ethics A-level course is growing steadily in numbers. Teaching and learning are very good. Students respond very well and are significantly challenged. Achievement is very good. All students participate in two days of religious education conferences and experience a range of other dimensions of the subject through visiting speakers to house and sixth-form meetings.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are above the national average.
- Students achieve well; their coursework assignments are of a high standard.
- Teaching and learning are good; teachers have very good knowledge of the subject.
- In some lessons, students need more opportunities to discuss their ideas.

Commentary

188. The standards achieved by students are usually above average. However, in 2002, A-level results were well below average, reflecting the overall ability of the students who were entered for the examination. The 2003 A-level results were good with grades at similar levels to those before 2002; all students gained a pass grade and just under half gained the highest grades, A or B. The AS-level examination results in 2002 were above average. In 2003, all students gained a pass grade and over one third of students gained the highest grades, A and B. All students achieve well and make good progress across Years 12 and 13. Overall, girls achieve better results than boys.
189. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of their work confirm that the achievement of students on AS- and A-level courses is good, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Students show good knowledge and understanding across all aspects of physical and human geography. They are able to apply successfully a wide range of geographical techniques in the collection, analysis and presentation of data in their coursework assignments. Map work is of a high standard; graphs and annotated diagrams are used very effectively. Many students demonstrate good use of ICT in their work.
190. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well organised with a good range of strategies and resources that promote good learning. Teachers give good-quality explanations and provide challenging questions for the students. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on urbanisation, the teacher effectively used ICT to develop understanding of urban growth in different cities and also to strengthen note-taking skills. A weakness in some lessons is that too much discussion is teacher led so that students do not have sufficient opportunities to discuss the subject matter or raise questions of their own. Assessment procedures are good and provide good guidance to the students. Relationships in lessons are very good and students demonstrate very good attitudes to learning. They are attentive and work effectively, both independently and collaboratively.
191. Work in geography is led and managed well. The curriculum is good and is enhanced by residential fieldwork for students in Year 12. Teachers' expertise meets the needs of the curriculum very well. There is a good stock of reference materials held in the department and in the school library. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, most notably with the increased use of ICT.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work.
- The subject is popular and student numbers are increasing.
- There is a strong and determined commitment to improvement.
- Lessons are located in too many different teaching rooms.
- Students' progress is not monitored thoroughly.
- Marking of students' work should indicate how to improve.

Commentary

192. Standards are average overall. The 2002 AS-level results were average in terms of the proportion of students gaining pass grades, but below average for the proportion of students obtaining the higher A or B grades. In 2003, the proportion of students gaining higher grades at AS-level rose, while the proportion gaining A-E grades fell. A-level results show a rising trend in

the proportion of students gaining pass grades over the past three years. However, the proportion of students gaining higher grades has declined. The standards of students presently in Years 12 and 13 are broadly average. Year 12 students show a good awareness of different models of memory and are able to understand and use psychological terms relevant to the study of memory. Students in Year 13 demonstrate the ability to design and carry out a research investigation and a grasp of the principles underpinning different theories of attraction and relationship formation.

193. The achievement of most students in the AS- and A2-level examinations is satisfactory. However, in 2003, a significant number of students underachieved. Contributory factors were inadequate staffing as a result of a rapid increase in student numbers. This led to weaknesses in the marking of students' work and in the monitoring of their progress. These weaknesses are now being tackled. Another contributory factor, and one which remains, is that too many lessons are taught in too many different rooms. This has an adverse impact on teaching and learning and on student motivation.
194. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' good subject knowledge is used well to promote effective learning. Teaching methods offer an appropriate level of challenge, and opportunities for students to contribute their own thoughts in class discussion. Students in Year 12 respond well to these opportunities but students in Year 13 depend more heavily on inputs from the teacher. Although students' work is marked regularly, it does not provide students with a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and what they need to do in order to improve.
195. Subject leadership and management are satisfactory. Analyses of performance have identified the weaknesses in the subject and there is a well-considered strategy for improvement and the raising of standards. Overall, progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the subject is now in a position to make more rapid improvement.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology AS/A-level courses. Textiles and food and nutrition were sampled. Standards in textiles are broadly average and achievement is good considering the relatively low entry-level grades for most students. Regular monitoring of work ensures that students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Standards in food and nutrition are average overall, although there are few high grades. Achievement is good. Teaching is at least good but some opportunities are missed to develop students' independent learning skills. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are encouraging to students.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Current work indicates clearly that standards are rising.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are well structured with very good relationships between teachers and students.
- Leadership and management are very good and the team of specialist design teachers is committed to further developing and improving provision and raising standards.
- Students should be given more opportunities to discuss their views and ideas in small groups and to present their findings to the group as a whole.
- Students should be encouraged to be more self-critical of their work.
- The department should develop a greater range of visual stimuli to guide and support students in their learning.

Commentary

196. A-level results have fluctuated in recent years showing a downward trend from 1998 to 2002 but AS-level results are improving and indicate an upward trend. The 2003 unconfirmed A-level results show an improvement on previous years with all students gaining a pass grade. In 2002, A-level results were above average in terms of the proportion of students obtaining A-C grades. The proportion gaining the highest grades, A or B, was below average but higher than in the previous two years. Students did well in relation to their prior attainment on entry to the course. Achievement is therefore good.
197. Current standards are average overall and students are achieving well. In Year 12, most students produce well-crafted design folders showing very good effort and good progress. Few students readily use graphing and presentation software but there is clear evidence of extended use of the computer in researching, analysing and presenting information. In Year 13, most students' initial research work shows a clear understanding of product specification. They appreciate that designers need to define the balance between cost factors and practical and aesthetic considerations. The quality of sketching is of a good standard. Outcomes are innovative, demonstrating creative flair and imagination as seen in the design of a 'street luge' used for extreme sporting activities.
198. Students' good achievement is attributable to the good teaching and learning that exist. The teachers have good organisational skills and plan work very well. Relationships between teachers and students are very strong and support good learning. Oral assessment is good in lessons and students are well informed about the standards achieved and what they need to do to improve. In some lessons, opportunities are missed for students to discuss outcomes in small groups and to present their views and ideas to the group as a whole. Teachers do not always encourage students to be self-critical and to focus more sharply on achieving higher-quality outcomes. Occasionally, there are missed opportunities to use visual teaching aids that can provide the right degree of stimulus in supporting students with their learning. Homework is used very well to promote good progress.
199. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Students are well provided for within the limits of the resources. Accommodation is good. The relatively new head of department has set a very clear educational direction and manages well the team of dedicated and committed staff. There is a sense of pride in the achievements of students and a clear recognition of what needs to be improved and developed, and this augurs well for the future of the subject as a whole.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design. Music was sampled. Provision for music is very good in both academic and performance terms. Sixth-form students are extensively involved in musical ensembles, and have a powerful and positive impact on the attitudes of younger students. Examination courses could be expanded to give greater access to more students.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and most students achieve very highly and progress at a very good rate.
- Teachers and students enjoy excellent relationships and students benefit from high-quality personal tuition and guidance.
- Students share ideas fully and work very well together.
- Excellent leadership and management support the work of the department and also in promoting the work of the school as a specialist arts college.

- Art accommodation, whilst good for the school as a whole, is barely adequate for post-16 courses offered, with such a diverse range of art media.
- Absence of full technical support undermines the teaching of such a range of art activities.

Commentary

200. Overall results in the A-level examinations in 2002 were in line with the national average but the proportion of students obtaining the highest grade A was much higher than average. AS-level results in 2002 were above the national average. The most recent results show upward trends with a higher number of A grades. The AS-level examination results provide a very good foundation for A2-level study with the retention rate of students into the second year being very good.
201. Standards in the current Year 13 are well above average with students achieving very well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE and AS-level results. The quality in students' sketchbooks and portfolios confirms these high standards. Students speak eloquently and with confidence about their work and demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding. The working environment is particularly stimulating with high-quality work on display. Excellent progress is evident, especially in painting. Large-scale interpretation is exemplary. Students' independence and maturity enable them to manage their own studies in completing coursework and working towards examinations. Art and design sketchbooks show excellent annotation and understanding of compositional principles and of techniques needed for development of coursework assignments. Students' independent research skills are being well developed. Their sharing of ideas and opinions about the influence of styles, genres and approaches on their own work, and on the work of other artists, is excellent.
202. The quality of teaching and learning is always very good with some outstanding features. The art and design staff have excellent subject knowledge and technical skill. All students speak well of the support and guidance provided by teachers. They are informed of how work can be improved, and theory and practical work are integrated most efficiently. Teachers' expectations are always high and lessons have very good pace and productivity. Visits to galleries and a shared commitment to extra-curricular experiences, including excellent community links, are some of the factors contributing to the success of the department.
203. Leadership is excellent. The head of department is inspirational and his passion for art is clearly communicated to all students and staff. The strong departmental teamwork has enabled the department to achieve very good improvements since the last inspection. The absence of full technical support and barely adequate accommodation undermine the teaching in such a wide range of techniques and materials. Overall, this is a most successful area of sixth-form provision and it is becoming increasingly popular.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEASURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on A-level physical education. There is a good range of examination courses on offer for physical education but no timetabled recreational programme of sport for other students. Many students in the sixth form make good use of the leisure centre fitness suite in their spare time.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS- and A-level results in sports studies are consistently above the national average.
- The quality of teaching and standards reached in the Community Sports Leaders Award (CSLA) course are excellent.
- The range of tasks to meet the needs of higher and lower attaining students following the AS-

and A-level courses is too narrow.

- More rigorous target setting should occur at regular intervals.

Commentary

204. Results in AS- and A-level examinations in 2002 were above the national average and represent good achievement overall. The boys gained better grades than in their other subjects, but the girls did not. This trend continued in 2003. Achievement for the boys is good but for the girls it is generally satisfactory.
205. Standards reached by the majority of students currently in Year 13 are above average and this includes the girls. Students are achieving well. They have a good grasp of the modules covered so far. Those students who have not had the opportunity to follow a GCSE course in physical education use their general knowledge and technical language well to reason logically through theoretical aspects and achieve well. Note taking is of a good quality and written work shows a good level of independent research. There are missed opportunities for students to use ICT. A minority of students (mostly boys) is not achieving as well as could be expected because they are not always prepared to do the required amount of study between lessons. The students following the CSLA course are mature young people and show very good organisational skills in preparing to arrange activities in local primary schools. Standards reached in extra-curricular activities are above average. A number of students represent the county and a few represent the country in a range of activities such as swimming, hockey and athletics.
206. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are good. In A-level practical lessons, the teachers effectively challenge the students intellectually and physically. They use their subject expertise to plan well, giving the students a range of tasks to develop skills such as independent research, teaching their fellow students and note taking. Students are very appreciative of the support that is given by the teachers and enjoy the challenge of the course. Homework assignments are not always planned to challenge effectively all levels of ability within the class, especially lower attaining students. Target setting occurs but should be done with more rigour, frequency and with increased expectations in relation to students' ability. The quality of teaching in the CSLA course is excellent. The planning of these lessons, taught in extra-curricular time, and use of resources is very effective in developing the range of skills that the students require.
207. Leadership of the department is good. The range of opportunities for the students has increased since the previous inspection, showing good improvement.

BUSINESS

A-level economics and AVCE business were sampled. In economics, the numbers entered are small but A-level examination results in 2002 were very good. Standards seen during the inspection were very good and teaching and learning were good. At AS-level, recent results in economics have been average, but with an improvement in the percentage of A or B grades in 2003. Standards in AVCE business were below average last year but standards in lessons seen during the inspection and in samples of work were good and teaching was good.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is stimulating and very effective. It motivates students and encourages them to produce work of a very high standard.
- Leadership and management are very good and departmental expectations are very high.

- A wide range of effective learning resources is used to raise standards, in particular ICT and the local business community.
- More detailed, written diagnostic comments would be beneficial in some students' work.

Commentary

208. The 2003 business studies A-level results showed an impressive increase in the percentage of students achieving the higher A-B grades over the previous year when they were below average. All students have passed the A-level examination in recent years. At AS-level in business studies in 2003, the percentage of A-B grades also showed a good improvement over the previous year when they were in line with the national average for all schools. The percentage of A to E grades also improved and all candidates passed the examination in 2003. These results represent very good achievement for the students involved.
209. Standards achieved in lessons are very good as a result of very good teaching and learning. In a Year 13 A-level lesson, students made excellent progress because teaching was outstanding. Guidance on the content and presentation of coursework was particularly well dealt with. Students were given excellent guidance and encouraged to undertake challenging research using a range of first-hand sources and personal experiences of business links, as well as information from national and multinational organisations. Students were able to use their well-developed ICT skills and a range of software to carry out detailed and effective research using the Internet. They were also able to analyse effectively and present information, argue a case and draw appropriate conclusions. Some spreadsheet work was particularly effective. In a very good Year 12 AS-level business studies lesson, an interactive whiteboard was used to very good effect by the teacher for a presentation on business growth. Skilful questioning ensured that all students were fully involved in the lesson. Good access to ICT has a positive impact upon teaching and learning. Portfolio work is detailed, well presented and thorough, enabling students to demonstrate their business knowledge and ICT skills. Assessment is frequent and thorough, although more written diagnostic comments would have been appropriate on some pieces of work in progress.
210. The leadership and management of the department are very effective. The head of department also has responsibility for careers, and links with the local business community are used very effectively to enhance teaching and learning in business studies and other subjects within the department. The work of the department is very well co-ordinated. Teachers work very effectively as a team, resulting in the efficient use of resources and the sharing of expertise. Improvement in the business education department since the last inspection is very good.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

