

INSPECTION REPORT

**JOHN KYRLE HIGH SCHOOL
AND
SIXTH FORM CENTRE**

Ross on Wye

LEA area: Herefordshire

Unique reference number: 116975

Headteacher: Mr Nigel Griffiths

Lead inspector: Mr Anthony Shield

Dates of inspection: 2 – 5 February 2004

Inspection number: 259234

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1071
School address:	Ledbury Road Ross-on-Wye Herefordshire
Postcode:	HR9 7ET
Telephone number:	01989 764358
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Blake
Date of previous inspection:	November 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

John Kyrle High School and Sixth Form Centre is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18, situated in Ross on Wye, Herefordshire. Pupils are drawn from the town and its surrounding villages. The socio-economic background from which the pupils are drawn is average. There are currently 1071 pupils on roll, with 155 in the sixth form. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. Attainment on entry is average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is average, with 165 pupils having identified needs. Most have learning difficulties, but a small number of pupils have hearing and speech impairments, and others have emotional and behavioural problems. The school has a designated 28 place unit for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, and these pupils are partly integrated into mainstream classes. Thirty-one pupils have statements of special educational needs. This is above average. Pupils are almost exclusively white British, and there are no pupils with English as an additional language. The school is a specialist Technology College and an Enterprise Learning Pathfinder school, and has also been awarded Sportsmark, the Healthy Schools Award, Charter Mark, a School Achievement Award (2003), a School Curriculum Award (2002) and Investor in People.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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9970	John Acaster	Lay inspector	
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23393	Brian Dower	Team inspector	English, English as an additional language
8552	Wallis Hart	Team inspector	Science
12411	Bruce MacFarlane	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
19867	Maxwell Pettit	Team inspector	Art and design
1782	Andrew Lyons	Team inspector	Design and technology, Business studies
20825	Brian Ogden	Team inspector	Geography
17732	David Martin	Team inspector	History, citizenship
32208	Derek Aitken	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31673	John Gwyer-Roberts	Team inspector	Music
31821	Brian McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
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27411	Heather Butensky	Team inspector	Special educational needs
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good school, with many very good features** and provides good value for money. Driven by the dynamic and determined leadership of the headteacher, the school is ambitious for further improvement. Standards are above average and improving. Pupils' achievements are good as a result of consistently good teaching.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The very good leadership of the headteacher and key staff is providing a strong sense of common purpose and direction.
- Hardworking staff are committed to providing high quality teaching and learning.
- Good teaching and the confident and positive attitudes of pupils ensure that most achieve well.
- Productive and increasingly effective links with partner schools and the wider community help to promote achievement.
- Assessment procedures and systems for monitoring pupils' progress are thorough and provide a very effective means of monitoring progress and supporting pupils.
- The impact of Technology College status has been very good, enhancing the quality of learning across all subjects, and particularly in design and technology which has made impressive improvements and has the potential to be a centre of excellence.
- Self-evaluation procedures are good but need further consistency at subject level to ensure that they are fully effective.
- The attendance of a small minority of pupils is unsatisfactory.

Overall, the school has made substantial improvements since the last inspection in 1997, maintaining the strengths identified and making confident and secure improvements elsewhere. Most importantly, there is now a strong and positive culture for school improvement. Standards in Year 9 tests and in GCSE examinations have been improving more rapidly than the national trend. A-level performance has been more mixed, although recent improvements are marked and much better results are predicted for 2004. Key issues at the time of the last inspection have been tackled effectively.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is good overall, given the pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7. In some subjects, it is very good. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are above average and pupils' achievements are good. Standards in the current sixth form are above average and higher than recent examination performance. This is the result of school focus on how to ensure more effective learning in the sixth form. Overall A-level results have been significantly affected by the poor performance in a small number of subjects. In some subjects at A-level, notably English, physical education, history and geography, results have been consistently above average. Standards in English, mathematics and science in Years 9 and 11 are above average, and pupils' achievements are good in each subject. In other subjects in Year 9, pupils' achievements are very good in design and technology, and good in all other subjects except information and communication technology (ICT), art, German and citizenship where they are satisfactory. In Year 11, pupils' achievements are very good in design and technology, geography and religious education, and good in all other subjects except German and citizenship where they are satisfactory.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good overall. Pupils' attitudes are good, particularly in the sixth form where they are very good. Pupils are keen to learn and their positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their achievements. Most are friendly and outgoing. Behaviour is very good, and many pupils, particularly as they move through the school, are considerate of others and behave with increasing maturity. Bullying is insignificant. Attendance for just under ten per cent of pupils is unsatisfactory. Attendance levels have been below average but are now improving as a result of some effective school initiatives.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The **quality of education** provided by the school is **good. Teaching is good**, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Teachers are hardworking and committed. They have high expectations and are confident in their subject knowledge. Many are using new technologies, particularly interactive whiteboards, with increasing imagination and effectiveness. As a result, learning is good in most lessons. The curriculum is good, preparing pupils successfully for their future. It is enriched by a very good range of out-of-school clubs and activities. The school's procedures for the care, guidance and support of pupils are very good. Tutors know their pupils well and are committed to their personal and academic development. Extensive links with the community and partner schools make a very good contribution to pupils' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good. Determined leadership by the headteacher has inspired others and gained their respect. He is very well supported by his deputy and senior team. The work of the governors is very good. They provide experienced and committed oversight of the school's work, and are astute and confident in their role. **Management is good.** The school is reflective, and management procedures for the monitoring and review of its work are systematic, although these are less consistently applied at subject level. Although the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met, governors have done all they can and standards are not being adversely affected.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school's partnership with its parents is good. Parents are very supportive of the school and, by and large, the school has their confidence. In particular, they are pleased that their children are expected to work hard, and that they make good progress as a result of good teaching. A small minority of parents are critical of the behaviour of some pupils. Pupils express considerable support for the school. They enjoy the challenge of the teaching and participate in all activities with enthusiasm. They feel trusted by their teachers. Whilst many pupils are critical of the behaviour of a minority, they feel that any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- ensure a more consistent approach to sharing good practice and the monitoring of standards by heads of department;
- continue to improve attendance;
- continue to work towards consistently good achievement in all subjects in the sixth form and review the range of sixth form courses to ensure student numbers are educationally viable;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- review the arrangements made for providing a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM CENTRE AT JOHN KYRLE SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form centre is providing a **good** education for its students, and it has improved since the last inspection in 1997. Although standards in 2003 were well below average overall, this judgement masks considerable variation between subjects. There has been a marked improvement in standards recently and predicted grades for 2004 indicate above average standards. This is confirmed by inspectors' observations of work in the current Year 13. Given their prior attainment at GCSE, students' achievements are good as a result of good teaching. There is a clear sense of direction, and leadership and management are good. The sixth form is not yet cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall results at A-level were well below average in 2003, although in a number of subjects, students achieved standards which were in line with or better than average.
- Student numbers in some subjects are too small.
- Students are overwhelmingly supportive and enjoy being part of the sixth form.
- Teachers are committed to the progress of individual students, and systems for assessing and monitoring their progress are very good.
- The curriculum provides a good range of academic subjects, but currently lacks a wide range of vocational and applied course opportunities for students.

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	English - Good. Standards are above average and students' levels of achievement are good because of the consistently good teaching, their own positive attitudes to the subject and the effective way in which the department is led and managed.
Mathematics	Good. A-level results have been mixed in recent years and last year were well below average. Current standards in Year 13 are above average. Teaching is good and students are achieving well.
Science	Biology - Good. Although recent examination results have been well below average, recent staff changes have led to good imaginative teaching and rising standards. Teaching is good and, overall, as a result, students' achievements are good. Standards in the current Year 13 are above average.
Humanities	History – Very good. Results at A-level have been above average and good proportions of students achieve the highest grades. History is a popular subject and consistently very good teaching is ensuring students achieve very well. Current standards are well above average. Geography – Very good. Standards are above average and students benefit from expert teaching and preparation. The number of high grade passes consistently obtained is impressive. The department is a strength of the school.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Design and technology – Very good. Results in product design were above average and all students passed in food technology. Students are exceeding their predicted grades as a result of some very good teaching.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical education – Very good. Standards are consistently above average and students achieve well as a result of very good teaching. Students are committed and enthusiastic.
Business	Business studies – Very good. A-level results are improving and in 2003 a good proportion achieved the highest grades. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. As a result, students achieve well and standards in the current Year 13 are well above average.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The quality of personal support and guidance that students receive is very good. Tutors know their students very well and are sensitive to their needs.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the sixth form is very good. Management is good. There is a clear rationale for the sixth form and considerable attention has been given to raising standards and the overall quality of provision. Management systems are well organised and thorough. Governors have a very good overview of provision in the sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being part of the sixth form and all surveyed consider that the teaching is challenging. They particularly appreciate the helpfulness of the teachers and the choice of courses. They consider that they are treated fairly and with respect. Their views are welcomed and often acted on. Although some are critical of the range of enrichment courses available to them and the level of advice on what to do on leaving school, inspectors judge the quality of support and guidance to be very good.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of work seen overall during the inspection are above average in Years 9, 11 and 13. Pupils' achievements are good throughout the school. Although girls do better than boys, the difference is not significant, and in most subjects is no greater than that found nationally.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievements are good throughout the school; in some subjects they are very good, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Results at A-level have been well below average overall in recent years, but standards seen are much higher and reflect the improving standards at all levels and the school's focus on effective sixth form teaching.
- Standards in national tests in Year 9 and GCSE examinations have been rising faster than the improving national trend.

Commentary

1. Given the pupils' average standards on entry in Year 7 as measured by their attainment in national tests taken at the end of their primary schools, most pupils' achievements are good. Cognitive ability tests taken by pupils on entry reflect the attainment of pupils as measured by Year 6 national tests. There is little variation in ability and attainment on entry in each year.
2. In national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the pupils' performance in English was well above average, and in mathematics and science it was above average. In comparison with 'similar schools' i.e. those with pupils who achieved similarly in Year 6 tests, performance in English and science was well above average, whilst in mathematics, it was above average. This good progress made by pupils during Years 7 to 9 was confirmed by inspectors' observations. The overall trend in performance in Year 9 tests has been improving faster than the improving national trend, although the rate of improvement in each subject has varied.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.1 (36.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	36.7 (36.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.4 (35.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 162 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Although girls tend to do better than boys, the difference is no greater than found nationally. In mathematics and science, boys sometimes do better than the girls. Overall, the difference between boys' and girls' results has been reducing in the last three years as a result of an increased school focus on raising boys' achievement. Able pupils and those identified as gifted and talented achieve well through Years 7 to 9. The achievements of pupils with special educational needs are also good.
4. At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades in 2003 was 57 per cent, above the national average and in line with the similar schools' average. The average total GCSE points score per pupil in 2003 was 45.1, above the national average and above the average of schools who performed similarly in Year 9 tests in 2001. Although the percentage of

pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades dipped slightly in 2003 from a high of 60 per cent in 2002, the total points score rose in 2003. In particular, boys' performance improved significantly in 2003 and was well above the national average.

5. The average points score of pupils' best eight subjects in 2003 was broadly average (35.5 compared to 34.7 nationally) and below average compared to similar schools. Over the last two years the percentage of pupils achieving one or more A*-G grade has been well below average, reflecting to some extent the performance of a small, but significant, number of disaffected pupils in Year 11 who underachieved. This has impacted on the overall average points score. The school has responded positively to this issue and has looked imaginatively to provide an alternative curriculum which is more suited to their needs. Pupils amongst this group in the current Year 11 are now achieving well.
6. Results overall since the last inspection have improved significantly from 44 to 57 per cent of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades, and the overall trend has been rising faster than the national trend. Value-added analysis indicates that pupils made average progress, and although this is less rapid than their progress through Years 7 to 9, this still represents good achievement throughout Years 7 to 11.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	57 (60)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (87)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (92)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.5 (34.7)	35.6 (39.8)

There were 174 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

7. In 2003, most subjects achieved results at around the national average although in design and technology, pupils' results were significantly higher than the national average. In food technology, results were significantly worse. The percentage of pupils achieving A* and A grades was higher than average in science, design and technology, religious education, geography and history.
8. Overall pupils' achievement, that is how high standards are in relation to their ability and prior attainment, are good throughout Years 7 to 11. In work seen during the inspection in both Years 9 and 11, standards were above average, in line with recent test and examination results.
9. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good. This is due to well-focused support from the learning support department and well-planned support in lessons.
10. The most significant factors in the improving learning culture are the quality of teaching and the quality of departmental leadership, which now has a strong focus on maximising achievement for all pupils. In addition, the good attitudes of pupils to their learning help to promote good progress.
11. In work seen in English during the inspection, standards are above average in both Years 9 and 11. Given their attainment on entry, pupils make good progress and achieve well through the school. Standards of literacy are above average throughout the school, and pupils make good progress because of their confidence in the use of language.

12. In work seen in mathematics, standards are also above average at the end of Years 9 and 11 and pupils' achievements are good overall. Standards of numeracy are above average. Most pupils accurately use and apply numeracy skills in different contexts, and are reasonably confident at mental calculations.
13. Standards in science are above average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils' achievements are good throughout. They have a good grasp of scientific principles and are learning to apply them in a range of contexts.
14. In other subjects in Years 7 to 9, pupils' achievements are very good in design and technology, and good in history, geography, French, music, physical education and religious education. Their achievements are satisfactory in ICT, German, art and citizenship. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' achievements are very good in design and technology, geography and religious education and good in all other subjects except German and citizenship where they are satisfactory.

Sixth form

15. In 2003, students' results in A-level examinations were well below average. Boys' performance has been less good than that of girls.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	85.3 (76.4)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	20.8 (23.1)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	188.7 (196.2)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 70 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

16. Although overall A-level performance in recent years has been below or well below average, the impact of the poor performance of a relatively small number of popular subjects, notably biology and psychology, has been significant in reducing the overall points score. In a number of other subjects such as English, mathematics, physics, geography, history, and physical education, results have been broadly average or often above average. In 2003, results were good in English literature where 7 out of 9 students achieved either an A or B grade, in business studies (3 out of 7), chemistry (2 out of 5), geology (3 out of 4), geography (3 out of 5), history (5 out of 17), sociology (5 out of 11) and product design (4 out of 5). Students mostly achieved the grades that were predicted for them and numbers taking the courses were in some cases too small for valid statistical comparisons to be made. Because numbers taking some subjects have been relatively small, results have inevitably varied from year to year.
17. Nevertheless the school has identified improving performance at A-level as an important priority, and some decisive action has been taken to ensure results improve. Staff changes have been made in crucial areas and there has been a strong focus on what makes for effective teaching and learning at this level. This is ongoing, but the impact of this emphasis on sixth form teaching is already being seen in the improving performance of current Year 13 students in AS examinations in 2003. Inspectors' observations confirm that there is an improving picture at sixth form level, and they judge standards overall to be above average and the achievements of most students in the current sixth form to be good. Standards are improving as a consequence of increasingly effective teaching which offers better levels of challenge and independent learning. Retention rates through courses are reasonably good with more and more students successfully completing the course.
18. Performance in AS examinations in 2003 was much improved, with good proportions of students achieving A or B grades in geography, history, mathematics, physical education, physics, psychology, sociology, design and technology and theatre studies.

19. In vocational courses, a small number of students in health and social care achieved good results, although results in travel and tourism were less good.
20. The school prides itself on open access to the sixth form and has adopted an inclusive policy towards taking students onto courses. It adopts a flexible approach and, although the entry criteria state that potential A-level students must have a good pass grade at GCSE, a number of students are admitted with minimum requirements.
21. Not all subjects were inspected in detail during the inspection. Of those which were, students' achievements, given their attainment at GCSE, are good in English, mathematics and biology. They were judged to be very good in design and technology, history, geography, business studies and physical education. Standards in all the subjects inspected in detail were above average for this stage in the course, apart from in biology where they were average, and design and technology and business studies where they were well above average. In subjects sampled, some good work was seen in chemistry, physics, geology, French, German, ICT and music.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes are good and their behaviour is very good. Personal development is good and promoted well. Attendance is satisfactory in the sixth form, but despite much work, and some improvement, attendance in the main school remains below the national average and is thus unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- As a result of strong leadership and improved teaching, the ethos of the school has been greatly improved, and this is reflected in consistently good attitudes and very good behaviour.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has similarly been strengthened.
- While lateness is now insignificant, and school arrangements for recording and chasing up absences are much more effective, attendance is not as good as might be expected.

Commentary

22. Pupils overwhelmingly agree that they like their school. They cite many reasons, and particularly remark on the new facilities, such as in design and technology, science and art. They appreciate the increased availability of computers and the impact of interactive whiteboards. Pupils have a high level of respect for their teachers, like most lessons and enjoy the varied activities available outside lessons. They like the atmosphere of respect and trust, are proud of the improvement their school is making and are glad to feel that they can individually contribute to that success. Attitudes to learning are good with most pupils approaching their work with confidence.
23. This cultural change has been brought about by dynamic leadership and a firm sense of direction. Management has been effective in establishing a behavioural code which is well understood by pupils and unifies staff in their responsibilities for its maintenance. Thus, subject teachers have a primary role in applying discipline within their own departments. The form tutor is kept advised. Only when instances multiply are successive steps taken through year heads and beyond as necessary, when it is handled very effectively. The system is very successful in ensuring consistency.
24. Pupils' behaviour tends to improve from joining the school. It generally becomes very good in the latter part of the main school and is excellent within the sixth form. Most are friendly and outgoing. Movement around the school is orderly and break times are sociable. Whilst many pupils perceive that behaviour could be better they are clear that the misbehaviour of a small minority does not affect learning, and that bullying is insignificant. Those pupils who do have

worries are able to take them to their peer support group which identifies and addresses low-level bullying. Whilst most pupils show good attitudes to their school work there is provision for off-site education for older pupils who find this more stimulating. Much consideration is given to individual cases. Consequently, permanent exclusions are rare, and the incidence of fixed-period exclusions is reasonable.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White - British
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Parent/pupil preferred not to say

Number of pupils on roll
1065
3
1
2

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
35	1
0	0
0	0
0	0

25. Pupils' personal development is good. Moral and social development continues to be a strong feature of the school. Property is well respected and relationships are very good. Cultural development, which was considered to be poor at the previous inspection, has been much improved and is now good. Multicultural themes come through. Many subjects make effective contributions towards this, including English, history, geography, music, modern foreign languages and religious education. Spiritual development, previously unsatisfactory, has improved. Pupils are asked to reflect on themes in assemblies, and some subjects, notably religious education, demand thought and empathy. However, statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship are not fully met and tutorial periods are inconsistently used for furthering personal development. The school has introduced ethical topics into its curriculum, and it has also recently got pupils to consider what sort of learners they are in terms of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic aptitudes. These are important additions to self-understanding and the processes of deriving meaning and values from life. Pupils respond to this good provision with increasing maturity and responsibility as they move through the school.
26. The school has improved its methods of registering and monitoring attendance which now meet usual standards. First-day absences are followed up promptly. Letters pursue outstanding matters. The education welfare officer frequently reviews absences below 85 per cent with heads of year and home visits are made when deemed necessary. Through these actions, attendance has improved since the previous inspection and there are signs of it improving further. However, it is still below the national average and about eight per cent of those on roll currently have attendance of below 80 per cent.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	8.4
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.2
National data	1.1

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the last complete reporting year (2002-3).

Sixth form

27. Sixth form students responded very positively to the pre-inspection questionnaire with 100 per cent indicating that they enjoy being a student at the school. They have satisfactory attendance and good punctuality. Their attitudes are very good and their behaviour is excellent. Students are often inspired and stimulated by the teaching in their chosen subjects. They participate

very well in lessons, showing sustained concentration. They like the atmosphere of responsible freedom and friendliness set by management. There is a purposeful quality to the private study arrangements, and quietness is respected. Sixth formers take their responsibilities seriously through the sixth form council.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. In particular, the good quality of teaching, the very effective use of assessment, the very good quality of advice and guidance given by tutors and pastoral staff and the highly effective links with partner schools and the community are ensuring that most pupils' achievements are at least good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are consistently good and frequently very good throughout the school. Assessment of pupils' work is very good and is being used effectively to inform planning and the pupils themselves on how they might improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is characterised by high expectations and levels of challenge.
- The commitment of teachers is valued by the pupils.
- Relationships are very good and, as a result, pupils grow in confidence.
- Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning.
- Rigorous and comprehensive performance assessment procedures enable teachers to plan the curriculum and set targets with confidence.
- Plans for assessment in citizenship are not yet effective.

Commentary

28. Around 98 per cent of pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire consider that they are well taught, confirming the school's own recent analysis of pupils' views. Inspectors judge the quality of teaching in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science, to be good.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 167 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (4.7%)	45 (30.0%)	77 (51.3%)	16 (10.7%)	4 (2.7%)	1 (0.7)	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.

29. The school has had a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in recent years. The school's monitoring systems, including its performance management processes, have focused on the factors which lead to effective learning. Pupils themselves have been made aware of their preferred learning style and teachers are beginning to plan lessons adapted to match the particular learning style of individual pupils. As a consequence, teachers have an increasingly good understanding of how individual pupils learn and how best to plan their teaching. This focus on how best to ensure effective learning has had a major impact on the quality of teaching, and the proportion of excellent and very good teaching is much higher than at the time of the last inspection.
30. Where teaching is most effective, it is led by the teachers with enthusiasm and commitment. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to interest and engage the pupils

in relevant and interesting activities. Very good relationships between pupils and teachers enable a purposeful working atmosphere. Many teachers are particularly good at offering encouragement and building confidence in the pupils' ability to learn. Above all, it is the high levels of challenge which ensure that good progress is made.

31. Pupils reported how much they valued the commitment of teachers to their progress. They particularly valued the extra time teachers were happy to devote to supporting and helping them with difficulties. In a number of subjects, but especially so in ICT, music, physical education and drama, the commitment of teachers to provide additional and extra-curricular activities is valued by the pupils.
32. Where lessons are less effective, it is usually because a fast pace of learning is not sustained, or that the pupils do not actively participate in their learning. In English, some of the classrooms are so cramped that opportunities to enable pupils to work in different groups are limited. As a consequence, discussion and oral skills are less well developed in these lessons. In modern foreign languages, art and mathematics, teachers do not always encourage pupils to develop discussion skills or more depth in their thinking through the use of questions.
33. A strength of the teaching is the very effective use of interactive whiteboards. In French, science, mathematics, geography and religious education, teachers were observed using this new technology to very good effect, not just to present ideas and information in an interesting way, but to motivate and involve the pupils directly in the learning. In a lower attaining Year 8 mathematics lesson on shape and space, pupils were measuring and drawing angles to the nearest degree. The interactive whiteboard was used very effectively to involve the pupils in measuring angles as well as understanding how to add or subtract from a negative number.
34. The use of assessment to monitor pupils' progress and to set targets for the next step in their learning is generally effective. Marking is particularly effective in geography, mathematics and French. Where it is effective, marking is regular and supplemented with constructive comments about how the work might be improved. Pupils are very appreciative of the quality of marking and nine out of ten pupils responding to the questionnaire felt their work was marked helpfully. The involvement of pupils in assessing each other's work is developing well. The quality of oral feedback in lessons is also high and, in the most effective lessons, teachers are continually looking for ways to move the learning forward by asking questions and suggesting the next step.
35. Planning of lessons is thorough and usually effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. Considerable work has gone into considering the different learning styles of pupils. This has yet to be fully embedded in the planning of all teachers, but in some subjects, notably English, it is already making a difference to the approaches to learning and teaching methodology. Boys in particular are benefiting from this more flexible approach to planning. Although girls still attain higher standards overall than boys, the differential has been narrowing in recent years at all levels in the school, as a consequence of teachers considering how boys in particular learn.
36. Pupils of all abilities, including those identified as gifted and talented, make good progress. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teaching assistants are well informed about pupils' needs and they plan well in collaboration with subject teachers. Individual education plans are used effectively in planning, which results in high levels of inclusion for all pupils. They are given clear and progressive guidance on how to achieve the objective. Teaching assistants work effectively alongside pupils, questioning, advising and asking for explanations, enabling them to complete tasks successfully. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, both the teacher and teaching assistant collaborated well in supporting individual pupils in their understanding of a Tennyson poem and the use of metaphor within the poem. Sensitive and probing questions allowed pupils to assimilate ideas and test them against their growing understanding of the poem. Both the assessment and identification of pupils with special educational needs have improved since the last inspection. National Curriculum results, cognitive ability tests and reading and spelling tests are used in

the identification of need on entry. Testing is also undertaken annually to monitor spelling and reading levels.

37. The school has introduced the national Key Stage 3 Strategy well. Good use is made of the three-part lesson structure, ensuring that a lively introduction is followed by opportunities for active participation by all pupils and further opportunities to consolidate learning at the end through a well-managed summary. However, on occasions, poor time management means there is insufficient time for pupils to reflect on their learning and consolidate what they have achieved. Activities are often well planned to interest and motivate pupils, particularly boys. In many lessons, active participation by the pupils ensures that learning is based on relevant experience.
38. Very effective procedures for the monitoring of pupils' progress through regular and analytical assessment are in place. Centrally organised records of pupils' marks in tests are very well managed. Assessments are regularly added to the computerised records and used to identify pupils who are underachieving. External examination results are analysed rigorously and action taken where necessary to secure improvements. Pupils have regular meetings with the academic development co-ordinator when targets are reviewed. An important aspect of the process is the emphasis given to the pupils themselves to take responsibility for their own self-review. Most pupils are aware of their targets and in most subjects they understand what needs to be done to achieve them. The school supports pupils very well and the assessment and support system makes a very effective contribution to the school's efforts to raise standards. Underachieving pupils are provided with extra help, their progress is monitored thoroughly and action taken to support and encourage them.

Sixth form

39. As in the main school, teaching in the sixth form is good and students make good progress. Significantly, 100 per cent of students feel that they are well taught and challenged to do their best. They particularly value the willingness of teachers to give time and help them if they have difficulties. The very good relationships between teachers and students are the basis for the successful teaching at this level and of students' good progress in their work. Of the subjects inspected in detail, teaching in English, mathematics and biology is good. In design and technology, history, geography, physical education and business studies it is very good.
40. The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching at sixth form level in the light of its recent relatively poor performance at A-level compared to results in the main school. This is now beginning to bear fruit. Staff changes in some subjects and a sharp focus on what makes for effective teaching and learning at this level is now making a real difference and ensuring much greater consistency in the quality of sixth form teaching than up to now.
41. Lessons are characterised by very good relationships between staff and students alongside an atmosphere of mutual respect. This encourages students to respond confidently and to be prepared to take risks in their answers and with their learning overall. Much teaching is imaginatively planned to excite and make the learning relevant. Typical of this approach was a Year 13 business studies lesson observed on marketing which challenged the students initially through lots of quick questions in the style of the 'weakest link', drawing parallels with current affairs. Excellent relationships ensured a very positive and purposeful learning environment as the students were challenged to explore and justify their ideas. Their understanding of the differences between various niche markets grew in leaps and bounds. One of the great strengths of teaching in all subjects is the teachers' subject knowledge. This ensures that teachers have a confident approach and are able to ask questions which challenge the students' thinking and deepen their understanding.
42. Much of the most effective teaching is inspiring students to develop more independent and self-reliant approaches to their learning. This was especially the case in English, mathematics and design and technology, but evident in all subjects to some extent. Lessons are often

characterised by a range of varied activities. Direct input by the teacher, collaborative working and some independent learning ensure that students focus strongly on their learning. Although some students lack confidence in their learning, most adopt a positive and mature attitude to their studies. They are keen to do well and this has a very positive impact on the progress they make.

43. As in the main school, increasingly effective use of interactive whiteboards in the teaching is being adopted. The use, for example, of the whiteboard in a Year 13 religious studies lesson on environmental ethics was effective in allowing students to present their research ideas imaginatively. As a result, a good discussion was generated and the students' understanding of conflicting biblical views deepened. Good use of the interactive whiteboard was also observed in mathematics, biology, geography and business studies.
44. Students' learning skills are increasingly good. Most students take care with the presentation of their work, and files and notes are well organised and can be used effectively for revision. Key skills of communication are developed well in all lessons through written work, well-managed discussions and group work. Students are encouraged to complete research tasks and discuss their findings in most subjects. Numeracy and ICT are also used well.
45. Assessment practice in the sixth form is very effective, and students feel very confident about the support and guidance they receive. End-of-course predictions are used to monitor performance and to help teachers set realistic and challenging targets within their subjects. Regular reviews are carried out during which targets are agreed and modified where necessary. During assessment week, progress is reviewed and assignment sheets are used to reflect on progress and targets. File reviews are carried out regularly and students are advised about learning strategies; as a result, students' records are well organised and useful for revision.
46. Students' work is assessed and marked very well. Marking of written work is often detailed and contains much diagnostic comment. Examination criteria are used effectively to give students a clear idea of the standards required. Written comment is further supplemented by detailed oral feedback in one-to-one discussions. In questionnaires and interviews, students reported that their work is assessed helpfully.

The curriculum

The school provides good learning opportunities across Years 7 to 13. The curriculum is broad, ensures very good continuity and coherence for both boys and girls of differing aptitudes and abilities. Extensive extra-curricular opportunities are a very strong feature. Accommodation is satisfactory and resources adequate. Sixth form provision is good and provides an increasingly extensive range of opportunities for pupils to pursue their academic and vocational ambitions.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The wide and extensive curriculum in Years 10 and 11 gives pupils a wide choice of GCSE options.
- The wider curriculum celebrates a range of activities, providing enriching opportunities for the diverse interests of pupils.
- The implications of the new arrangements with increased flexibility for the 14 to 19 curriculum are well understood and there is appropriate planning to make sure that needs can be met in order to encourage the progress and achievement of all pupils.
- The positive impact of specialist school status which is helping to transform teaching and learning and increase facilities for both staff and pupils.
- Whilst accommodation is adequate, some rooms are too small to facilitate group and discussion work.

Commentary

47. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 meets the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and for religious education. In Years 10 and 11, a series of carefully considered option blocks complements the core subjects to offer a good range of choice to pupils and the timetable constructed from option choices varies by year to reflect them. For lower attaining pupils a progressively developing range of courses is being provided in-house and via the Increased Flexibility Project in subjects, such as construction, health and beauty and rural science, as an alternative in the science curriculum. Each of these courses is accredited. The scheme operates in conjunction with a team of providers including local colleges and work-based training providers. The school has sensible plans to respond to the new more flexible approach to curriculum planning in Years 10 and 11.
48. The school has identified its gifted and talented pupils in all subjects and provided them with individual plans which offer extended opportunities and provision geared to their needs. At present, no fast track approaches exist nor are GCSE courses started early. Work experience is offered to all pupils in Year 10.
49. The Years 10 and 11 curriculum has considerable breadth, is better than average, and includes at GCSE level drama, physical education, music, industrial production, pottery, religious studies (short course) and textiles. Twenty-one different subjects were taken in 2003. Business studies is taught as an applied GCSE and there is a GNVQ ICT option. The impact of specialist Technology College status on the curriculum has been good. Most notably, the increased provision and use of ICT is enabling more imaginative and stimulating approaches to teaching and learning.
50. Provision for pupils with special educational needs across the school is good. Pupils' literacy and numeracy needs are addressed through separate teaching groups in Years 7-11. The quality of this provision is good and pupils respond well to the effective and well-focused teaching in all groups. For example, in one Year 11 history lesson, pupils were able to understand and identify different types of propaganda used in the Second World War. Years 10 and 11 pupils are offered alternative vocational courses and appropriate accreditation. Most individual education plans are reasonably well written but a small number lack specific learning targets.
51. Since the last inspection the school has done much to develop the wider curriculum so that it is now comprehensively celebrated with a significant range of extra-curricular opportunities: drama and school productions, music, dance, team games, the important Ugandan link, Duke of Edinburgh Award, special interest clubs, charitable work and enrichment visits into and out of school from fieldwork to visiting speakers.
52. There is a coherent programme of personal, social and health education and the quality of careers education and guidance is now much improved. Increasing community involvement and the liaison with other providers extends opportunities, more so in the upper years. This range develops learning in a broader sense and supports the positive ethos the school has successfully developed. Successful one-day conferences are a feature of this work.
53. Staffing is good throughout the school. There are sufficient numbers of teachers and they have a range of expertise that covers the curriculum.
54. Accommodation and resources are broadly satisfactory overall, although this conceals considerable variations. Resources are adequate for all pupils and are very good in some respects. For example, the much better provision of ICT and the recent introduction of interactive whiteboards across many subjects have made a very strong impact on teaching and learning, and on pupils' keenness. Technical and scientific facilities have similarly been much strengthened.

55. Accommodation is generally adequate. Some areas, however, are barely so. Rooms are quite often very cramped for numbers in the classes using them, thus detracting from the quality of pupils' educational experience. The English department is particularly hampered by having rooms which are too small and lacking adequate storage. Its facilities for drama are similarly unsatisfactory. While unsatisfactory areas such as these exist, some very good accommodation has been created for certain subjects, for example design and technology, science and art. The school library facilities have also been much improved since the previous inspection. The library is well stocked and used, with specialist staff on hand to help pupils.

Sixth form

56. The sixth form has grown in number in recent years and provides an impressive range of 23 courses to A-level. Innovatively, courses are available in geology, film studies, textiles and ethics as well as the standard full range. Additionally, courses are available in AVCE/GNVQ Intermediate in health and social care and travel and tourism. Not all of these run in each school year and some have very small numbers, fewer than six, which reduces intellectual interaction and student development as well as questions viability. Entry to courses is based on a minimum of five grades C or above at GCSE for A-levels, four or more for other courses. Religious education is satisfactorily provided for sixth form students through day conferences.
57. Careers education and guidance have improved with the head of sixth form playing a crucial role in the pastoral wellbeing of students but also in their progression to higher education or employment. The school is reviewing its sixth form provision to attract and retain a greater number of students from more diverse ability groups in order to promote progression within the 14 to 19 curriculum. In this respect, it is seeking to work with other schools and providers from September 2004 to boost numbers on existing courses and see where new developments can most appropriately be made.

Care, guidance and support

There are good arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. The school provides pupils with very good support, advice and guidance based on monitoring. It involves them well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils are very systematically monitored and supported both academically and pastorally, promoting a strong focus throughout the school towards improving achievement.
- Induction arrangements are very friendly and thorough, and pupils are also very pleased to be receiving good quality career and further education guidance.
- Pupils feel consulted concerning their school life and can point to a series of improvements they have prompted through the school council.

Commentary

58. Systematic health and safety procedures, including risk assessments, are in place and reports are made to the governors' working party. Improvements have been made to toilets, as requested by the school council. Appropriate further improvement is planned. Child protection arrangements follow the local guidelines and awareness is well established. Pupils' medical needs are effectively and sensitively handled. Alert management in this area keeps heads of year regularly briefed to assist their pastoral knowledge.
59. Both parents and pupils are impressed by the quality of the induction process from primary schools which results in smooth relationships and a good knowledge of individual pupils. A widely-appreciated feature towards this in recent years has been the establishment of a summer academy. Form tutors and heads of year normally accompany the same pupils as

they move up through the school. Through this stability, individuals and their home background become very well known. The confidence and relationships thus promoted form a very good basis for pastoral support. The school's personal, social and health education includes good provision towards the choices to be made when leaving school. The careers library has been well developed and much information is readily accessible. Pupils receive appropriate placements and visits.

60. Since the previous inspection great improvements have been made in systematic assessment and its use in furthering the progress of each pupil. On a consistent basis, and in relation to expected targets, both attainment and effort are charted frequently in every subject. Academic development co-ordinators in each year group consider the outcomes in relation to each pupil. Keeping the heads of year informed, they discuss these with the form tutor. In particular, variances are then explored with the pupil, for which time is regularly set aside. Pastoral knowledge is used alongside this academic tracking. The system is very effective and is employed more frequently and incisively, for instance, to gain extra focus on how pupils are progressing.
61. The special educational needs co-ordinator meets regularly with the departmental special needs link members to review pupil progress, both academic and social, and provision and decisions are made as to appropriate interventions. Where necessary the local education authority's physical, sensory and learning support services are involved. The school's educational psychologist has undertaken counselling training for staff and offers social skills training to pupils. Regular links with social, health and voluntary organisations are maintained. The co-ordinator has made good links with the local primary schools in order to ensure good transition for pupils. Support and guidance for pupils with special educational needs is comprehensive and pupils are offered the same support and guidance as is available to all.
62. Pupils are quite clear that their views are sought by the school and valued. As individuals they are generally consulted concerning the setting of targets and in mentoring matters. They answer occasional questionnaires. Each tutor group has representatives on the year council and matters are thence carried to the school council, meeting twice each term. Significantly improved break-time seating arrangements have been achieved among several other things, and much consideration is now being given to making the school more eco-friendly, and working towards the Eco-schools Green Flag Award.

Sixth form

63. Provision is very good. Students are very pleased with the plentiful and friendly information and guidance they received before entering the sixth form. Teachers are accessible, approachable and helpful. Target grades are set and monitored in all subjects, and appropriate individual interviews take place occasionally with tutors and teachers. Help with careers is good and most students consider they are well prepared for university applications. Students' views are very effectively taken into account through the sixth form council. They consider that they are treated fairly and with respect.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents is good. There are effective links with other schools and colleges in the neighbourhood. Community links are very good and are significantly enriched by the well-developed partnership with a Ugandan school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's dedication to improvement on all fronts is communicated very effectively, and parental satisfaction has consequently improved greatly since the previous inspection.
- Technology College status has been used very beneficially to derive a strong partnership with partner schools and the wider community.

- A small minority of parents fails to give consistent support so that attendance, for instance, is less good than it should be.

Commentary

64. Parents have a high opinion of the school and its reputation is growing. Although fewer parents than at the previous inspection responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, their approval of the school's work, across the whole range, is much greater than it used to be. They consider the school is well led and managed, very approachable, supportive and expecting high standards. The school addresses the individual needs of all pupils well, and issues are swiftly dealt with.
65. Communication is very good. Substantial illustrated newsletters keep parents informed half termly. Parents are pleased with the curricular and progress information they receive, for example through the homework diaries and target setting, and as a result most provide their children with appropriate support for completing homework. They are aware when, as occasionally happens, individual teachers do not stick to the expected homework timetable. The school's written annual reports have been improved and are generally of a good standard, inviting pupil and parental comment. The school appropriately informs and liaises with parents of pupils with special educational needs. It is also thorough in contacting parents of pupils experiencing difficulties, and in following up matters, such as absence, and progress review meetings, where parental contact has not been made.
66. Links with local schools and colleges are good. Involvement with partner primary schools has deepened since Technology College status has been achieved. The school now markets itself more actively. More and earlier visits are made so as to get to know those pupils who are likely to be joining, and liaison is now offered, for example, by demonstration of specialist lessons and by loan of equipment. Curricular links are developing. For example, the school now provides a bridging unit in mathematics, planned in collaboration with partner primary schools. Pupils are pleased with the carefully devised programme to help them make choices about the next stage in their education, and arrangements for liaison with local colleges are well established. Pupils' appreciation of the wider world have benefited from local links such as those with the Royal National College for the Blind, but especially from those with its special partner, Kisiki College, Uganda, which are particularly wide and deep. The latter have led to a very broad range of initiatives, often in partnership with the Ross community.
67. The reputation of the school in the local area has increased. It is recognised as being proactive and ambitious. Those parts of the campus which have been improved recently, such as the technology and arts sections, are now a credit to the town. The school is outward-looking and keen to maximise on its community links. It is, for example, very supportive to youth groups, and the school's facilities are frequently used by local people. It has established very good relationships with the business community and frequently obtains their sponsorship. Pupils receive much curriculum enrichment from a wide range of visits and visitors. Charter Mark recognition for effective partnership with parents and the community has recently been obtained. The school's standing was further marked this year by a visit from HM the Queen.

Sixth Form

68. Many sixth form students take advantage of the school's very good links with the outside community. They have been able, for example, to have discussions with two local Members of Parliament. Increasing numbers of students are visiting the Ugandan school. Sixth form courses are enriched by appropriate visits. Students feel that they are being very well encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities presented, such as in community work in Year 12.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are very good. Dedicated and clear-sighted leadership by the headteacher ensures that his vision for the school's development is shared by the whole community. He is very well supported by his deputy and senior team, who work very effectively alongside governors and team leaders at all levels. Management is good and increasingly effective. The work of governors is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership of the headteacher inspires the confidence of the whole school.
- Self-evaluation procedures need greater consistency at subject level to ensure they are fully effective.
- There is an impressive commitment to the inclusion of all pupils.

Commentary

69. The headteacher is providing very good leadership. He leads with insight and a clear sense of purpose. He is very well respected by the whole school community and as a result has been able to make rapid and secure improvements in provision. He has the committed support of governors, staff and parents and his vision and values are widely shared. Decisive action has been taken whilst retaining a sense of humanity. In recent years, the school has acquired specialist college status as well gaining a School Achievement award in 2003, Investor in People status, a Healthy Schools Award and the Charter Mark. All of these reflect an improving school and one ambitious for further improvement.
70. The deputy headteacher, four assistant headteachers and the senior administrative officer provide committed and professional support to the headteacher, confidently carrying forward their areas of responsibility. The leadership team as a whole is a strong focus for school improvement and individuals within it have played significant roles in recent developments.
71. There is a strong commitment to the development of teams at every level. Most subject and pastoral team leaders are providing very effective leadership of their teams, working hard to improve standards. Staff as a whole are reflective and analytical, working conscientiously for further improvements to their school.
72. Management at all levels is good. The school has introduced a systematic process for the monitoring and review of all aspects of the school's work through its quality assurance and professional development (QUAD) procedures. The commitment to improvement and the sharing of good practice are evident in the improving performance at all levels in the school's work, but particularly at sixth form level where progress has been uneven in the past. Identified weaknesses in sixth form teaching have been tackled and while outcomes as yet remain mixed, inspectors share the school's confidence that results in 2004 will show a marked improvement.
73. In addition, systems for self evaluation – 'maintain, improve and change' – which have been introduced at all levels are increasingly effective, and link appropriately with continuing professional development and school improvement planning. As yet, however, self-review procedures are not fully embedded in practice at subject level. As a result, some inconsistencies remain, particularly the effectiveness with which teaching and learning are monitored, good practice is shared and action is taken to secure improvements. Good practice in design and technology, history and geography is not consistently applied in other subjects. The lack of systematic monitoring of teaching in Years 7 to 9 in ICT, for example, is impacting on the quality of provision. In mathematics, the subject improvement plan is not updated each year. Consistent approaches to improving literacy across all subjects are hampered by the lack of formal monitoring of practice.

74. Leadership and management of the provision for special educational needs are very good. Effective procedures are in place to identify and meet pupils' special learning needs. Very good use is made of assessment data to track pupils' progress over time and to identify targets for pupils' individual education plans.
75. The school improvement plan is a one-year plan and is detailed and comprehensive, with targets under curriculum, personnel and community/environment headings which match the governors' working parties. This enables governors to monitor carefully the progress being made towards meeting identified priorities. The improvement planning process is sharply focused and provides a good framework for improving standards. Issues identified by the inspection team have mostly been identified by the school already in its improvement plan.
76. The school has used its status as a technology college very effectively, not just to provide additional resources but to permeate the work of the whole school. This has been particularly effective, for example, in the good use of ICT and interactive whiteboards in a number of subjects.
77. Governors are very ably led by the chair of governors. They are an experienced team and bring a wide range of expertise to the school. Their involvement in both strategic planning and monitoring is based on a good knowledge of the school. Governors are kept well informed, and detailed performance and financial reports are provided for them to make informed judgements and decisions. They are consulted on school improvement planning and are increasingly confident in their monitoring role. Statutory requirements are met, except in relation to collective worship.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,354,085	Balance from previous year	92,778
Total expenditure	3,108,657	Balance carried forward to the next	245,428
Expenditure per student	3,021		

78. The school's budget is very well managed. The senior administrative officer has a very assured control of the budget. As a member of the leadership team, he is able to be proactive in determining the way in which funding can be used to support educational priorities. Governors have a very good overview of the budget and are regularly updated with clear monitoring statements. The school applies best value principles very well and regularly evaluates the cost effectiveness of service providers. Financial audits have been carried out irregularly but the most recent audit in 1999 judged the financial systems and controls to be satisfactory. Designated funds, including those for the Technology College, special educational needs and staff training are used well.

Sixth form

79. Leadership of the sixth form is very good. Governors and staff share a clear vision for its development. Decisive and well-considered action has been taken to improve standards in particular subjects and this is leading to improved provision. All staff who teach in the sixth form have a performance management target related to sixth form standards, and traditional approaches to teaching and learning in the sixth form are being challenged. There has been a determined focus on improving sixth form attendance and a better use of sixth form study time. This is beginning to have an impact on standards.
80. Management of the sixth form is good and is the responsibility of the head of sixth form, who is developing a strong leadership role with his tutors and students. Monitoring systems are well

organised and thorough. Performance data is used very effectively to set targets and carefully monitor students' progress.

81. Although a number of courses run with small numbers of students, which means that the sixth form provision is not fully cost effective, the educational rationale is clear. The school is planning to extend its offer of vocational courses.
82. The school maintains the high levels of pastoral and academic care offered to pupils in Years 7 to 11 throughout the sixth form. An increasing proportion of Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form. Retention rates on courses are good with most students completing the courses that they started. The school is aware that more needs to be done to improve sixth form standards further, and it has well-considered plans to promote these. The sixth form is now well placed to sustain and build on its considerable successes. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

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

- Pupils make significant progress and their levels of achievement are good.
- Pupils learn well because of the consistently good teaching.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Insufficient time is given in some lessons for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt and how they could improve.
- The extended writing of some boys is poorly organised because they fail to plan and draft their work with sufficient care.

Commentary

83. Although the proportion of pupils obtaining a grade in the A*-C range in the 2003 English language GCSE examinations was broadly average, the performance of the boys was below that of their national counterparts. The results overall represented satisfactory achievement when account is taken of pupils' average levels of attainment on entry to the school. The standards reached were not typical of the above average trend in pupils' attainment in such examinations over time and the dip in performance was because a minority of pupils lacked application. The results in the GCSE English literature examinations were above average for boys and girls and their levels of achievement in the subject were good. The standards attained were higher than at the time of the last inspection.
84. The results in the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above average for boys and girls and pupils' levels of achievement were very good. The standards attained were well above those of similar schools and this improving trend has been maintained for two years. The results were better than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils' performance in the subject was similar to that in mathematics and science.
85. Current standards of written work seen during the inspection are above average in Years 9 and 11 and achievement for both girls and boys is good. Most pupils write fluently and accurately at length and are able to adapt their style for different purposes. There are, however, a small number of boys whose extended writing is poorly organised because they are careless in the planning and drafting of their work. They do not use paragraphs appropriately and make limited use of complex sentences. The department has appropriate strategies in place to address this area of underachievement. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. The subject makes good use of the school's computer facilities to enable pupils to draft their writing and present it in varied forms.
86. Reading standards for all pupils are above average, as are their speaking and listening skills. They achieve well in these areas of their work. Pupils read aloud fluently and with expression and they have no difficulty understanding a range of increasingly difficult texts as they move up the school. They are confident and clear when speaking and understand the conventions of formal English and when it should be used. Pupils listen well, showing respect for the views and feelings of others. This ability to concentrate on what others are saying is a significant factor in how well pupils are learning.

87. The good teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 and at GCSE level, together with pupils' positive attitudes to the subject, account for the above average standards achieved over recent years and in the work seen. The issues which accounted for the unsatisfactory teaching at the last inspection have been addressed and pupils now benefit from work which is challenging and taught in a rigorous manner. All the teaching seen was good and there are elements which were very good. Lesson planning is detailed and takes account of pupils' different styles of learning. Teaching approaches are varied to meet different needs and pupils respond by working diligently and productively. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in all lessons and pupils learn well. In some of the lessons seen, teachers failed to allow sufficient time for pupils to share what they had achieved and so learn from each other's work. Too often at the end of lessons, it was the teacher commenting hurriedly on the coverage of the learning objectives rather than giving time for pupils to reflect on and evaluate how well they had done. The work of teachers and pupils is restricted in some classrooms because they are too small. In those rooms, for example, it is impossible to alter seating arrangements to make discussion or group work more effective. There is also little space to display and celebrate pupils' best writing. The needs of the least competent pupils in Year 7 are not being met because of the size of the teaching group.
88. The quality of the leadership and management of the subject has brought about the improvements in standards and in teaching and learning over time. The leadership provided by the head of department and his deputy is very good. They are committed to running an equitable and inclusive department where the work of all teachers and pupils is valued. Morale is high and there is a sense of common purpose and direction which results in effective teamwork. The management of the subject is good. Effective systems are in place to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress and to take appropriate action. Schemes of work have been written to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and that all National Curriculum and examination requirements are met. Appropriate assessment procedures provide pupils with constructive feedback on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. The school's senior management team gives effective support to the work of the department. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. There is the capacity for further improvement because teachers are self-critical and committed to continuous professional development.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

89. Pupils throughout the school have above average language and literacy skills. They are able to adapt their writing to the needs of the curriculum. Extended writing is well organised and accurate. Pupils show knowledge and understanding of a range of texts, many containing specialist terminology, because of their well-developed reading skills. This was seen in science when they used specialist language and technical terms with confidence. Pupils also read aloud confidently, fluently and with expression. Oral skills are well developed. Pupils explain themselves clearly at length, they can develop and amplify the points they make and they are able to engage effectively in group discussions. They learn well because they are able to listen for extended periods of time and because they show respect for the contributions of other pupils. There is a strong emphasis in religious education on developing pupils' speaking skills and time is given for them to think and then explain what they know and understand. The provision for literacy is good in modern foreign languages with opportunities provided for writing in various forms and for discussion.
90. The literacy co-ordinator has promoted the sharing of good practice across departments and has clear priorities for future developments. However, the school does not have a formal system to identify areas of weakness in pupils' literacy skills, to target provision and then monitor its effectiveness. There is no policy or procedure to ensure the good practice which exists to raise the standards of literacy is implemented consistently across the curriculum.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Committed leadership has brought about a significant rise in standards.
- Pupils achieve well in French because of good teaching.
- Pupils are hesitant in oral work as this skill is under-emphasised in lesson planning.
- Schemes of work in Years 10 and 11 and the monitoring of German are not fully developed.

Commentary

91. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 record standards in French that are well above average. Work observed in the inspection indicates above average standards. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 dipped to below average in French and German, thereby reversing the steady upward trend of recent years.
92. Standards in French are above average in all years and pupils achieve well. This is largely because teachers have embarked on the new national strategy in Year 7 and its influence is providing a sharper focus to learning in all years. Listening, reading and writing activities are nicely blended to develop competence in these skills and pupils regularly pull together all the strands of their knowledge on a topic in a short piece of extended writing. 'Dot' books and the extensive use teachers make of ICT sources in devising lesson material support pupils' learning well. The department makes a strong contribution to numeracy development in Years 7 to 9 enabling pupils to practise computational skills and construct bar and pie charts through surveys. Standards in speaking are lower as planning to promote oral work is insufficiently prioritised. This inhibits oracy and results in a steady rather than brisk pace in lessons. In Years 10 and 11, schemes of work are not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of the highest attaining pupils systematically. Standards in German, begun in Year 8, are below average in Year 9 and average in Year 11, which represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils.
93. Teaching and learning are good in French and satisfactory in German. Teachers work hard to produce a range of attractive materials and use successfully a wide variety of presentation methods including the new interactive whiteboard to develop pupils' understanding. Good relationships, close monitoring and encouragement create a positive climate for learning and help teachers gain a better awareness of individual requirements. A Year 7 French class with a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs achieved well because written work was adapted to provide challenge for all, while informal assessment was well used in a Year 10 French class of higher attaining pupils to boost their learning. Teacher questioning secures effective comprehension but is not varied or challenging enough to enable pupils to reach their full potential in speaking. Regular formal assessment, including some self-evaluation, supported by competent marking give pupils a clear idea of their progress. Learning in German where there are some inconsistencies in teaching and in planning for progression is satisfactory.
94. Leadership is good. It is focused on continuous improvement and has put in place several systems to strengthen teamwork and ensure greater consistency in approach. There has been substantial improvement, primarily in French, since the previous inspection. Management is satisfactory, because monitoring of German is not rigorous enough to ensure a similar high quality of provision. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average.
- Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11 and are now above average with pupils achieving well.
- Teaching is mainly good with very good use of new technology.
- Curriculum leadership is a strength.
- Imaginative teaching which challenges pupils to think more deeply and discuss their work in class is currently not sufficiently widespread.

Commentary

95. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, results were above average. Standards in GCSE examinations, however, are average with the percentage gaining A or B grades below average. Standards of work seen on inspection are consistent with test results in Years 7 to 9 but are closer to above average in Years 10 and 11. Standards are higher than in GCSE examinations because of the improvements in teaching methods which are stimulating pupils' enthusiasm for the subject and sustaining good progress and levels of achievement. As a result the vast majority of pupils are now achieving well in lessons across the school. Boys and girls are achieving equally well, as do pupils with special educational needs. However, a small group of middle and lower ability Year 11 pupils following an alternative curriculum are not taught in ability sets and are underachieving.
96. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes very good or excellent. In all years, planning is good with an emphasis on direct teaching. Lessons always start with an introductory activity and the sharing with pupils of learning objectives that are reviewed at the end. A strong feature of the teaching seen in all lessons is the very good use of interactive whiteboards which allows the subject to be presented in a stimulating way and is significantly improving the pace and accessibility of learning. Due to this, pupils enjoy the subject, sustain concentration and work productively throughout lessons. Where teaching is very good, more imaginative methods are being used to challenge pupils to think more deeply about their work and to become confident in offering their own explanations during class discussion. In these lessons there is at least very good achievement because of a noticeable faster pace and intensity of learning. However, teaching of this quality is not sufficiently widespread. Pupils' work is assessed thoroughly by all teachers, pupils are aware of their levels and grades and there is good follow-up when underachievement is identified. Marking of pupils' work is also generally well done with supportive comments and advice on how to improve. In the marking of homework there is inconsistency in the system used by teachers to indicate to pupils the effort made and the standard achieved.
97. The quality of curriculum leadership is very good. The head of department provides a very good role model and is dedicated to securing improvement through effective teamwork. He has clear vision arising out of careful personal reflection and extensive discussions with colleagues frequently in informal settings. There is a strong desire to raise achievement of pupils while retaining their enjoyment and enthusiasm for the subject. Good procedures are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observation. New initiatives are regularly evaluated and there is strong support for teachers. Improvement since the last inspection is good and standards, particularly in Year 9 tests, have improved significantly.

Mathematics across the curriculum

98. Opportunities for using and applying mathematics across the curriculum are clearly identified. This is helping to further develop pupils' mathematical skills and is effective in contributing to the quality of learning in other subject areas. Generally, pupils demonstrate above average mathematical skills in making calculations and in handling data with evidence of good practice in many subjects across the curriculum. The use of mathematics is particularly strong in design and technology where pupils generally show very good numeracy skills and appreciation of spatial awareness.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' good achievements are the result of effective teaching throughout.
- An effective introduction activity, followed by a very good review of pupil progress at the end of the lesson, ensures learning is reinforced.
- Whilst teachers focus work very effectively on the tests and examinations, the pupils do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.

Commentary

99. Standards in tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations in 2003 were above average. Although GCSE results since the last inspection have been improving, there was a sharp decline between 2002 and 2003. This has been halted. Standards in the work seen during the inspection were above average in both Years 9 and 11. In Year 9, pupils are confident with science ideas, apparatus and data but make too few decisions themselves. They do not plan or communicate their findings well. In Year 11, higher attaining pupils achieve the highest grades. Their GCSE coursework is very good; they do calculations with confidence and use ICT to support learning very well. Evaluations by pupils of the sources and procedures they have used sometimes lack precision. Achievement is good throughout Years 7 to 11. Pupils maintain a high level of interest. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress. All pupils have very good access to teachers outside lesson time and good technical support.
100. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school, with some very good features. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on refraction, the teacher initially involved the pupils by getting them to tell him about 'looking at things under water'. He used their ideas and built upon them to enable the whole class to decide what to change and what to observe when aiming light rays at a glass block. The active involvement and imaginative approach adopted by the teacher ensured very good learning. Whilst many lessons were characterised by fast pace, hard work and effective interventions by the teacher, in some, the pace slackened while pupils waited for the teacher to tell them what to do next. As a result, pupils do not take enough responsibility for planning and organising their own learning. Marking is usually sound although sometimes the teacher's comments are not sufficiently clear about what needs improving. Teaching in GCSE classes is challenging and ensures that pupils are actively engaged. A very good Year 11 lesson on the electromagnetic spectrum, for example, involved the pupils themselves in researching ideas in groups and reporting back to the class using a slide presentation. Teachers use the interactive whiteboards effectively to present ideas and stimulate learning. This was observed to very good effect in a Year 10 lesson when pupils were asked to annotate photographs of a dissected kidney. Effective questioning skills encourage pupils to discuss their ideas confidently. Teachers manage their classes very well and relationships are very good throughout, allowing a positive learning ethos to be established.

101. Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection, improvement has been very good and especially so since last September, when shared leadership of the department has led to increased collaboration and clearer responsibilities. The science leadership group work very effectively as a team. The department runs smoothly and pupils receive good support and guidance. Innovative and exciting new approaches to teaching and learning are being introduced. However, these have not been in place long enough to be fully effective.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good; this excites and enthuses the pupils and promotes good achievement.
- The lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching in Years 7 to 9 means that the quality of learning is not consistently good.
- There is insufficient matching of work to the needs of individual or groups of pupils in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

102. Standards are in line with expectations in both Years 9 and 11. The achievement of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and in Years 10 and 11, it is good. Achievement is better in Year 11 because of the good and sometimes very good teaching of specialist teachers whose good subject knowledge is a key factor in ensuring good progress. Pupils receive a broad range of experiences in Years 7 to 9. They demonstrate good skills in the Windows environment and network system and show satisfactory knowledge of word processing, spreadsheets and presentation programs. Many pupils' awareness and use of handling and refining information is less well developed than their skills in finding things out. Pupils can use the Internet but some have difficulty with the language of basic research skills. All pupils follow an ICT course in Years 10 and 11. They build on their earlier experiences and make good progress. Most pupils can apply their knowledge and develop satisfactory coursework. More able pupils effectively use the advanced features of spreadsheet and relational database programs.
103. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are confident in Years 10 and 11 and pupils feel secure in asking questions which are then used as a developmental point, for example "What is the difference between analysis and evaluation of a project?" The enthusiasm engendered by the teachers flows over to the extra-curricular lessons which supplement the school work and are very well attended even though many pupils live some distance away. The quick pace, imaginative use of time and robust assessment in many lessons have a good impact on pupils' achievement. Pupils respond to time demands when the active introduction gives them a clear idea, for example about how long they have to produce a heart – via Bezier curves – for their design. In Years 7 to 9, progress is slowed because work is not always matched to pupils' needs, their prior attainment is not recognised by the teacher and there is little challenge in the work set. In one activity all pupils were required to input and format data when at least a third of the pupils had indicated they already had some experience of spreadsheets. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy for ICT is satisfactory. However, some teachers are only just beginning to employ a structure to lessons which engages pupils and promotes learning. At times, the beginning and summary contain undemanding question and answer sessions.
104. Leadership is good. A clear vision has been implemented, relationships are warm, there is a push for improvement and the head of department is a good role model for other teachers. Management is satisfactory. There is a lack of rigorous and systematic monitoring and

evaluation of teaching and learning to identify areas for development, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement. The department has a considerable number of interactive whiteboards which are used effectively to support teaching. Teaching has improved in Years 10 and 11, and this, together with a new assessment procedure, is supporting pupils' learning.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

105. The cross-curricular aspects of ICT provision have improved and are good overall. All subjects are using ICT to enhance teaching mainly through the use of interactive whiteboards. Pupils' learning is well supported in mathematics, English and design and technology. Due to high demand, particularly by teachers teaching ICT, some subjects have more limited access to the computer suites. These include geography, religious education, art and modern foreign languages and, as a result, the benefits to the pupils' learning in these subjects are less marked. The school has robust plans in place to increase the number of computers and other hardware which should remedy this problem.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are attaining standards above the national average at GCSE.
- The good teaching which is leading to good learning.
- History is a very popular option choice at GCSE.
- Coverage of the areas of study in Years 7 to 9 is not balanced.

Commentary

106. In 2003, the pupils' GCSE results were in line with the national average and with their results in other subjects. A particular strength was that 18 of the 79 pupils entered gained an A grade. This represented a slight fall from 2002 when results were above the national average, with 13 of the 71 pupils entered gaining the highest A* and A grades. The trend since 2001 has been an improving one.
107. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This represents good achievement for pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. Pupils show an increasing knowledge and understanding of the subject, such as the pupils who used historical sources to consider the causes of poverty in Britain in 1900 and those who explained why Nicholas II was deposed in 1917. Standards in the current Year 9 are above national expectations. This represents good achievement for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, in relation to the standards they were achieving in Year 7. Pupils of all abilities show good knowledge and understanding of events and people in the past, for example when Year 9 pupils explained the harmful aspects of the working conditions for children in nineteenth century textile mills. Their historical enquiry skills are equally well developed. By the end of Year 9, pupils' understanding of the history of a non-European society and of the later twentieth century is not so well developed.
108. The quality of teaching is good with some very good features. Relationships between teachers and pupils are characterised by mutual respect and this leads to a very good working atmosphere in lessons. The planning of individual lessons is particularly good, usually with a variety of tasks that build pupils up to a challenging task. In a very good Year 11 lesson pupils in groups had to prepare a short presentation on an aspect of the condition of the poor.

Carefully chosen resources, matched to pupils' abilities, together with clear teacher explanation, enabled them to do this very well in a very short space of time. Teacher questioning is also successful in helping pupils to think for themselves and to explain their historical ideas. Pupils respond positively, work with interest and enjoy history. At GCSE, they are compiling excellent note sets. Teacher assessment at GCSE is very thorough and pupils have precise targets to help them to improve. In Years 7 to 9, pupils would benefit from more explicit guidance in teacher marking on how to improve their skills and understanding.

109. The leadership and management of history are very good. There is effective monitoring of teaching and learning. The teachers of history form a committed team. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen in Years 7 to 9 and teaching has improved. The history rooms are now grouped together but the cramped conditions in some make teacher support for individual pupils very difficult. The department has increased its use of ICT but recognise this as an area requiring further development.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is a strength of the school.
- Examination results have been good, with well above average numbers achieving high grades.
- Developments in teaching methods and high standards of expectation make for a quality learning experience for most pupils which encourages excellence.
- The link between assessment, target setting and what to do to improve further is highly developed and made clear to pupils.
- Large numbers in Years 7 to 9 classes, weaker basic skills amongst lower attainers and the underachievement of some boys restrain progress in some lessons for this age group.

Commentary

110. Standards in geography are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11. During the past three years at GCSE, results have been consistently well above average, and the proportion of pupils reaching A* and A grades is particularly high. In 2003, there was a drop in attainment but results remain above the national average.
111. In the work seen, pupils' achievements, including those with special educational needs, are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. High standards are expected. Work is systematically recorded and shows that pupils transfer what they have been taught into their own learning. The department policies on marking, assessment, target setting and recording achievement are consistently applied giving pupils supportive or evaluative comments to help progress. Particularly effective are the resumes on tests and investigative assignments which indicate to pupils where they currently stand and what needs then to be done to improve to the next level/grade. The use of enquiry and associated skill development in Years 7 to 9 to encourage pupils to think is outstandingly developed. The work from lower attainers follows the same pattern but to a lower level of sophistication, detail or length of content. Some work seen is compromised by weak basic skills, more noticeably amongst boys than girls, with literacy the weakest and in Years 7 to 9 rather than later on.
112. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 is particularly good, more especially that submitted for GCSE fieldwork which scores high marks. It reflects the impact of the good quality teaching given and is a distinct aid to raising attainment at GCSE as well as being an indicator of how the department scores highly in the proportion of A* and A grades it consistently achieves.

113. Teaching is good overall; it is never less than satisfactory, with much very good and some excellent teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11. This reflects the high expectations and standards of the subject specialist staff who are widely experienced with examination requirements but also shows how they use their outstanding personal knowledge to bring topics to light more vividly, aid understanding and develop the interest of pupils, as seen in the work on coastlines or when using ICT in a study on volcanoes. They are transforming their teaching methods to provide high quality lessons aided by the new technology of laptops and whiteboards. Teachers plan interesting lessons, encouraging a variety of learning strategies to develop knowledge, understanding and geographical skill. Pace and challenge in lessons are normally good or better. Learning is better in Years 10 and 11 than in earlier years when the large numbers, especially in Year 9, weaker literacy skills, more so amongst boys than girls, and more challenging behaviour amongst lower attainers restrain achievement in some groups. Attitudes and behaviour are exemplary in later years, confirming the very good relationships and high expectations that exist. Targeted questioning differentiates adeptly, includes all and there is no significant difference in the achievement pro rata by different groups of pupils.
114. Both the leadership and management of the head of department are very good indeed. There is a clear vision and expectation for the subject, shared by the specialist team as seen in the great strides made recently to modernise, upgrade and improve the quality of teaching using modern technology. Administration is exemplary with updated schemes of work, a position statement, analysis of examination and pupil performance and a well-constructed improvement plan which takes account of the findings of that rigorous analysis. All years now undertake fieldwork to aid their enquiries. The department is aware of reduced uptake in recent years and the potential consequences for the future. It is also aware of the need to raise its profile and appeal by the end of Year 9 and it has plans to do this so that more pupils share in the high academic performance it achieves. Accommodation is pleasantly suited but overcrowding for some classes is an issue. Formula funding is not generous and the absence of ICT facilities, even networking and Internet connection, available to staff and pupils within the subject area is now a serious barrier to further advances being made.
115. Since the previous inspection, the established tradition of pursuing academic excellence has been maintained, teaching has been significantly enhanced with the introduction of new technology and the relationship between teaching and learning and the part assessment plays in this equation has clearly progressed and is put to good use. Geographical enquiry skills have been further developed to a high degree of sophistication.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and results in Years 10 and 11 are very high.
- The subject makes a major contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The expert use of resources, particularly the interactive whiteboard, enhances learning for all pupils.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Non-specialist teaching slows the pace of learning in Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment is not always used effectively in Years 7 to 9 to plan work for individual pupils.

Commentary

116. GCSE results in the short course for grades A*-C were well above average in 2003 and have been rising steadily for four years. Well over half of the year group took the examination and all

pupils gained a grade in the A*-G range. Current standards are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Years 10 and 11 and represent very good achievement for these pupils. All pupils, including girls and boys, those who are gifted or talented and those with special education needs achieve very well because the work they are asked to do is interesting, challenging and carefully matched to their individual needs. Higher attaining pupils are able to make comparisons between the faiths they study and show insight into spiritual and moral issues such as the nature of suffering and different responses to it. For example, pupils in Year 9 were engaged in role play as a result of watching a moving video featuring three real people who have either lost or deepened their beliefs as a result of personal tragedy. Lower attaining pupils develop a good knowledge of the topics they have studied but are less confident and skilful in putting forward their own views.

117. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. In Years 10 and 11, lessons are planned which involve a wide variety of resources, such as videos, music, films, textbooks and dynamic presentations using the interactive whiteboard, so that pupils are challenged, engaged instantly, made to think for themselves and, occasionally, inspired. The subject is taught with academic rigour. Pupils are familiar with sacred texts, the ideas of key philosophers and the conflicting views of theology and science. Work is equally challenging for pupils following the non-examination course. Vigorous discussion took place in one lesson in Year 10 focusing on the nature of multicultural Britain and the extent to which the law has a role to play in ensuring social harmony. Lessons in Years 7 to 9 are thoroughly prepared and planned but the pace is slower and learning is sometimes inhibited by the fact that the teachers are not subject specialists. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good-humoured and positive and contribute to the very good learning and achievement. Assessment is very good in Years 10 and 11 but could be used more effectively in Years 7 and 9 so that pupils know more precisely how they can improve and what standard they have reached.
118. This is a very good department with inspiring leadership. Teachers are committed to continual improvement and self-evaluation is rigorous. There has been very good progress in nearly all aspects since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching from knowledgeable and experienced teachers leads to good learning.
- A very good range of activities and projects which covers a wide variety of materials and excites and motivates pupils to make work of quality, and learn very well.
- Very good assessment strategies, particularly those using the examination board criteria for coursework in Years 10 and 11, to ratchet up standards.
- The significantly improved facilities, building, equipment and staff, that combine to provide a stimulating environment for learning.
- As the pupils go through the school they develop very good attitudes to their learning which enables them to learn well.
- Excellent leadership by the head of department is forming a very effective team.

Commentary

119. GCSE examination results by individual material areas vary year on year because the makeup of the groups also varies. Overall results are significantly better than national averages, and better than pupils' grades in most of their other subjects. Boys' results are worse than girls, although similar to the national difference. Last year the overall pass rate was just above the national average but the number of passes at A* to C was well above. Some material areas

achieved very high pass rates with many pupils achieving the very highest grades. In lessons, both boys and girls attain similarly and the current years show an even higher standard. Pupils' achievements, including those with special educational needs, are very good.

120. At the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is just above the national averages. Currently there are few pupils working at the very highest levels when compared with the national averages but the school has identified this as a matter to address. Because pupils join the school with lower than expected standards in design and technology, progress is very good and all pupils achieve very well.
121. The high performance results from teaching with effective teaching materials, real expertise and a genuine commitment from staff to enable pupils to do well. During the inspection, teaching was good, and often very good, and enabled good learning. Pupils have moderate attitudes to learning in the earlier years, but improve as the stimulating lessons and teachers' high expectations impact. These raise the pupils' attitudes such that, in the GCSE years, pupils become independent learners, work very hard, achieve very well and produce interesting work of high quality. Resources are continuing to be built up using the Technology College funds effectively. This enables not only the full National Curriculum to be taught, but offers exciting opportunities to make a wide range of work of high quality, including innovative use of resources like the new laser cutter and smart materials for making products like a thermometer. There are new schemes of work which are exciting, innovative and fun. Pupils are supported by very helpful assessment which uses the examination marking criteria very well to help raise standards significantly. Learning is good and often very good, and pupils show maturity, listening well and working quickly to make the best progress they can.
122. There is excellent leadership of the team of very proficient teachers and day-to-day matters are managed very well. There is high quality team work evident in the department. Teachers and technician staff are all equally valued. Accommodation and resources have been recently extended and refurbished and provide a very stimulating environment which celebrates the pupils' successes with extensive displays of their work. Resources are generally good, but more computers and control equipment are required to allow pupils full access. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent, with new accommodation, vastly improved resources and the recruitment of a group of staff who are knowledgeable, experienced and committed. Signs are already in place that the very good improvement in standards will continue and the department has the potential to be a centre of excellence.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 enables pupils to achieve well.
- Some less effective teaching restrict pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9.
- Excellent specialist accommodation allows pupils to work on a large scale in a wide range of media.
- Pupils have little opportunity to use ICT to generate art work.

Commentary

123. Standards in Year 9 are average, and pupils' achievements are satisfactory given the standard of most pupils on entry to the school. Pupils' observational drawing skills are weak and sketch books are insufficiently used to develop initial ideas. GCSE results in 2003 were below average. Standards in the current Year 11 are higher than these results and are broadly in line

with the average. This is because of increasingly effective teaching of GCSE groups. As a result, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well. They demonstrate good manipulative skill in ceramics and produce imaginative work derived from the study of a range of contemporary artists. Substantial final pieces in art and design are confident, bold and imaginative. Sketch books are well used but annotations are often variable in quality. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others and pupils designated talented in art achieve well. In Years 10 and 11, boys achieve less well than girls.

124. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with good teaching in Years 10 and 11 but with some unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9. Pupils progress well when teachers make effective use of their subject knowledge to provide imaginative exemplars or demonstrations that stimulate their interest. By Year 11, pupils are able to consolidate their understanding because teachers provide incisive individual advice founded on effective assessment and target setting, and supported by regular homework. Less effective teaching is characterised by a lack of challenge, weak questioning skills, inappropriate strategies and lessons that move at a slow pace. In Years 7 to 9, teachers' planning pays insufficient attention to regular and progressive opportunities for observational drawing, and devotes too much time to research activities.
125. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Art teachers have a strong commitment to improvement. Recent changes in subject leadership have generated appropriate reviews of assessment policies and established strategies to raise boys' achievement that are starting to bear fruit. Development planning identifies the current lack of ICT to enable pupils to generate art work, but the recent emphasis on Years 10 to 13 has led to some loss of focus on Years 7 to 9. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 needs reviewing to ensure pupils receive a more substantial grounding in key practical skills. Pupils benefit from the good range of extra-curricular opportunities available in art. The excellent accommodation enables them to work on a large scale in a wide range of media. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Drama

Overall, the quality of provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils attain above average results in the GCSE examinations and their levels of achievement are good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good throughout the main school and in the sixth form.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities to broaden and enrich pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the subject.
- There are inadequate resources to develop the technical side of the subject.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and limits the range of work which can be undertaken.

Commentary

126. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the A*-C range in the 2003 GCSE examinations was above average for boys and girls. This represents good achievement for pupils who were taught drama as part of the English curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9. It also represents good improvement since the time of the last inspection. Results were similar to those attained in 2002.
127. The work seen during the course of the inspection is above average in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Levels of achievement are good. Pupils in all years work well collaboratively and

are able to communicate ideas and emotions using a range of drama techniques. They have good evaluative skills. The work they do makes a significant contribution to their personal development and the issues they explore through performance contribute to their moral and social awareness.

128. Pupils achieve well because of the good teaching which is both stimulating and challenging. Teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subject and employ a range of teaching strategies to motivate pupils. They are able to put across their own enthusiasm for the subject. They have established very good working relationships in the classroom and ensure that pupils of all competencies are actively involved in preparing for and contributing to performances and in evaluating their own and each other's work. The result is that pupils work diligently and creatively. There are many opportunities for them to broaden their learning through a wide range of activities provided outside of taught time.
129. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Significant improvements have been made to the curriculum in recent years to meet pupils' different needs. The subject has been particularly successful in sustaining the high standards attained at GCSE. It has also enabled talented pupils in the sixth form to explore a range of acting techniques through imaginative, unscripted performances. There is a strong sense of common purpose pervading the work of the department because of the effective teamwork. Rigorous systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating the work of pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form.
130. Accommodation is one small drama studio which restricts the range of work that can be done. There is no scope, for example, for pupils to experiment with set design and layout. The technical side of the subject is neglected because there are not the resources to provide pupils with sufficient lighting and sound equipment and an appropriate range of costume and stage props.

Music

Provision for music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to good achievement for all pupils.
- The leadership of the department is very good.
- The caring and supportive ethos in the department helps pupils achieve well.
- The range of instrumental and extra-curricular activities is very good.
- ICT is not yet used consistently to support learning.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 is not fully developed.

Commentary

131. Teacher assessments for Year 9 indicate that standards are above average, reflecting the standards seen during the inspection. This represents good achievement. Results at GCSE in 2003 were slightly above the national average and were well above in 2002. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average and pupils' achievements are good. The numbers of pupils opting for the course is healthy, and with the increased use of ICT in Years 7 to 9, this should help recruitment further. Pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11, although no Year 11 examination classes were seen during the inspection. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils show very good prior learning with their knowledge of key terms and musical concepts. They are able to compose confidently melodies for a pop song and Year 8 pupils could notate four-bar rhythms accurately and demonstrate a very good knowledge of the 12-bar blues structure, including chords and different bass lines in their performances. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils showed good knowledge and understanding of different degrees of the scale and could compose melodies which included modulation.

132. The department has a strongly inclusive ethos and pupils of all abilities are welcomed in GCSE groups. Boys achieve equally well as girls and the scheme of work is well tuned to cater for pupils of all abilities. As a result, pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. ICT is used well to support and extend learning and although its introduction is relatively new its full impact on teaching and learning has yet to be fully realised. Pupils' work is neat and there is useful feedback for pupils on how to improve. There is clear assessment criteria which are shared with pupils and linked to National Curriculum programmes of study. Effective use is made of pupil record sheets and target setting in Years 7 to 9. Assessment is also very good at GCSE with pupils given target grades and working grades. The monitoring of pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 is not fully developed.
133. Teaching is a strength of the department, and is very good throughout all years. Teachers know their subject well and they are enthusiastic. Work is very well planned and imaginative ways are used to teach key concepts. Teachers teach beyond the statutory and examination requirements to develop musicianship in their pupils. Teaching is very supportive and pupils enjoy their music lessons. Effective use is made of starter and plenary sessions at the beginning and end of lessons. Explanation of tasks is very clear and well directed. Pupils' attitudes consequently are very good and they work productively.
134. The provision for instrumental and vocal tuition is very good and the extra-curricular activities are a strength of the department. Eighteen per cent of pupils have instrumental lessons and participation rates for the choirs, orchestras, bands and numerous instrumental groups are high. Some of these groups are pupil led. Pupils are given regular opportunities to perform and many attend residential weekends run by one member of staff which further consolidates learning and develops musicianship.
135. Leadership and management are very good, strong and effective. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in teaching, curriculum planning and standards. Both members of the department work very well together and their complementary strengths enrich the learning and experience of pupils. Peripatetic liaison is now much better and is being strengthened further. There is a real sense of vision and a continued commitment to raising standards.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching is consistently good across the department.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.
- Pupils are extremely enthusiastic and levels of participation are high.
- Good leadership and management contribute to a positive ethos.
- The good practice of encouraging pupils to exercise initiative is not consistent in all lessons.

Commentary

136. Teacher assessment indicates that in 2003 the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 9 was well above the national average. Standards in the present Year 9 are above average overall. Standards of non-examination pupils in Year 11 are average overall. Individual pupils of different ages attain standards that are well above average in football, rugby, hockey, netball and athletics. In the 2003 GCSE examination, the proportion of pupils attaining A* - C grades was just below the national average. Standards of attainment are higher in the present Year 11,

particularly in practical lessons. The quality of pupils' written work also supports the view that most are on course to obtain good examination grades.

137. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. The department does not receive any information about standards on entry but there is clearly a very wide range of ability. Pupils are progressing particularly well in Year 7. This was the case, for example, in lessons involving football, hockey and dance. By the end of Year 9, most pupils make good progress in a range of different activities. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good for the majority of pupils following the examination course, and for all pupils following core physical education. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others.
138. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are consistently good. Lessons that are carefully planned, progressive and challenging result in good learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are particularly positive and encourage learning at all levels. Pupils co-operate very well together in practices aimed at improving their performance. A key strength lies in the fact that pupils are taught good learning habits through a consistent and structured approach in all lessons. In some lessons, opportunities to allow pupils to exercise initiative, for example by leading warm-up activities, are missed. Pupils respond very well to the teaching they receive and participation rates are very high throughout the school.
139. Departmental staff, supported by several other colleagues, provide a good range of additional activities after school. These mainly involve team games. The provision of a wider range of extra-curricular activities has been identified as an area for future development.
140. Good improvement since the last inspection has seen the introduction of a revised assessment system. Individual target setting has become a feature for examination pupils. New textbooks have been purchased and the use of ICT is gradually being extended. Outdoor facilities have been improved through the provision of a large floodlit hard court area. Regular use of the local health and fitness club allows pupils in Years 10 and 11 to experience practical activities that they cannot access in school.
141. Leadership and management are good. The department is organised efficiently and managed effectively. Teachers work well together and are mutually supportive. Examples of good practice are shared. Last year the department was successful in its re-application for the Sportsmark Award.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most subjects make an effective contribution to citizenship.
- Systems for recording and assessing pupils' achievement are not yet fully implemented.

Commentary

142. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in all years. By the end of Year 11, pupils have an average knowledge and understanding of some of the topical issues that they have studied. They are able to reflect upon the responsibilities and difficulties facing political leaders that they experienced during their simulation of being President of a country for a day. Some pupils had considered the nature of political control in their work on Orwell's '1984' in English whilst others had examined the portrayal of the fox hunting debate in the media. In a Year 10 religious education lesson, pupils were able to consider the challenges posed by living in a multicultural

society and created a mind map to illustrate such key terms as prejudice and racial harmony. By the end of Year 9, pupils demonstrate broadly average knowledge and understanding of citizenship, such as those pupils in a Year 9 history lesson who had a very clear idea of what basic human rights everyone should be entitled to.

143. Pupils in all years demonstrate an increasing sense of personal and group responsibility in their attitudes to themselves and to others in school. All have the opportunity to reflect upon their participation in such activities as music and physical education. Many have taken advantage of the extra opportunities to take part in sporting and artistic activities as well as to take responsibility in school, for example as mentors for younger pupils or as members of the school council. Others have taken part in community service such as the Year 7 pupils who worked for the Christmas Fayre.
144. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory. When citizenship is explicitly identified in subjects, pupils are interested and contribute well to discussion. Their teachers work hard to create an atmosphere in which the pupils feel confident to express their ideas and in which pupils are sensitive to the views and beliefs of others. In discrete citizenship sessions, pupils are positive about their experiences.
145. Leadership and management of citizenship are good. The subject leader has been in post since September 2003. Since then, discrete citizenship sessions in all years have been introduced. In addition, there are effective contributions to citizenship from the other subjects of the curriculum ensuring that the programme of study is covered. There is a system of regular meetings to monitor the teaching and learning of citizenship across the curriculum, which is beginning to show results. There is a planned system of portfolios for recording and assessing pupils' achievement in citizenship but this has not yet been fully implemented, although recent subject reports detail the citizenship activities covered.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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	6	33.3	90.0	0	42.7	10.0	39.0
Biology	6	50.0	81.6	16.7	33.2	16.7	33.2
History	6	66.7	91.8	0	37.2	23.3	37.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	10	100	96.1	40	48.7	78.0	85.1
Biology	23	47.8	91.6	8.7	36.3	31.3	74.1
Business Studies	5	60.0	96.4	0	32.8	40.0	76.5
Chemistry	6	100	94.0	16.7	45.9	60.0	81.1
Drama	6	100	98.1	50	41.5	83.3	82.9
English Literature	6	100	98.5	66.7	43.7	100.0	84.3
Geography	8	87.5	97.1	62.5	40.5	77.5	80.9
History	15	100	97.1	46.7	41.0	85.3	81.2
Information Technology	8	50	89.1	0	22.4	22.5	64.1
Mathematics	12	75	93.3	33.3	52.2	63.3	84.7
Other sciences	9	100	94.7	11.1	40.1	62.2	78.7
Other social studies	9	66.7	94.3	0	38.9	35.6	77.7
Physics	8	87.5	92.8	25	42.8	60.0	78.6
Sociology	12	91.7	95.4	16.7	39.6	61.7	79.1
Sports/PE studies	8	100	95.4	50	29.5	85.0	73.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is an improving trend in standards and students' levels of achievement are good.
- Students achieve well because of the consistently good teaching and their positive attitudes to the subject.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Too few male students are choosing to study the subject in the sixth form.

Commentary

146. English literature is taught as a one year AS course and as an A-level course over two years. The subject is popular with girls although a few able and committed boys choose to study the subject each year. As a result, the students' educational experience in discussion and group work is more limited.
147. Students attained above average results in the 2003 A-level examinations and their levels of achievement were good. These standards have been maintained for some time now and represent an improvement on what was attained at the time of the last inspection. Students' performance in the AS examinations at the end of Year 12 was in line with national averages and their achievement was satisfactory.
148. The work seen during the course of the inspection is above average in quality and students continue to achieve well, as a result of good teaching. Those in Year 12 are developing a personal approach in their interpretation of the set texts and are reading widely to broaden their understanding of the context in which writers work. Students' analytical skills are highly developed by Year 13 and their critical writing is well informed and succinct. Students are attaining such standards because of the good teaching which is both stimulating and challenging. Teachers have the ability to put across their own enthusiasm for the subject and to motivate students to become independent and self-reliant in their studies.
149. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Teachers work closely as a team and have high aspirations for the students. There is a strong sense of common purpose and a commitment to improving further the quality of provision through ongoing professional development. Effective systems are in place for evaluating the subject's performance and for informing students about the quality of their work and how to improve. Students speak highly about the advice and guidance they receive. There have been good improvements since the time of the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

150. Provision for the development of key skills in language and literacy across the curriculum is good. There is evidence in subjects like English that students are encouraged to use literacy skills to improve the quality of their written work and oral discussions. When this happens, such skills support their learning and enable them to achieve well in their examination courses. Students studying mathematics are confident and articulate when evaluating their work and they have developed very good skills of independent study. This was also seen in the science courses where students communicated well with each other and the teacher because of their fluent and precise use of scientific terms

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although A-level results have been well below average, standards in the current Year 13 have improved and are now above average.
- Teaching is good overall.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very good.
- Independent learning is currently restricted to examination syllabus work.

Commentary

151. Results at A-level in recent years have been well below average. There has been no difference in the performance of male and female students in these examinations. Standards of work seen on inspection in Year 13 are higher and are above average. This is because the present students studying A-level entered the course with A and B grades at GCSE and are better equipped to deal with the rigour and demands of study at this level. The school has also modified the order in which modules are studied to ease the transition to the course when students start in Year 12. As a result, students are now achieving well both in lessons and in relation to prior attainment. There are currently two separate mechanics and statistics groups in Year 13 comprising of 18 students altogether.
152. The quality of teaching and learning is overall good in both Years 12 and 13. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and present it in an energetic and enthusiastic way to motivate and capture the interest of students. When teaching a topic they take particular care to make connections between work previously covered in any of the modules students have studied. Students respond well in lessons particularly when the work is practically based and related to real-life situations. This was evident in a very good Year 13 mechanics lesson on Hookes Law and equilibrium. While a small group of students demonstrated experiments with two connected bungy springs the teacher and the rest of the class observed, made calculations from the measurements being taken and discussed and interpreted results.
153. In all lessons seen there is very effective use by both the teacher and students of interactive whiteboards which helps to maintain a good pace of learning and improves understanding of concepts through visual representation. Homework is regularly set to practise techniques and to develop independence in learning, with students given encouragement to develop their own strategies for solving problems. There are limited opportunities for extra-curricular experiences to broaden understanding and to enhance enjoyment of the subject.
154. The provision of academic guidance and support to students is a strength. Extra help is available outside of lessons. Achievement is constantly monitored by teachers and all students are aware of their predicted grades and current performance. Student attitudes to the subject are very good, particularly in Year 13. They are very enthusiastic about the subject which they enjoy and are confident when they talk about their work.
155. Work in the sixth form is very well led and is taught by a small group of teachers who co-operate and support each other. The curriculum meets the needs of students and provides flexibility with the alternative mechanics and statistics courses available. Since the last inspection the curriculum has been improved with greater choice and more students studying mathematics. Teaching methods have improved with the effective use of interactive whiteboards.

Mathematics across the curriculum

156. Opportunities for students to develop competence in mathematics are available in a variety of subjects and this is helping to support and access learning across the curriculum. Generally, students demonstrate above average levels of competence in mathematics. This was evident in several lessons, including a geography lesson where very good levels of competence in the use of statistical techniques were being used during investigative work.

SCIENCE

Biology was the focus subject but physics, chemistry and geology were sampled. Although chemistry results have been well below the national average, in 2003 students performed better, and some gained the highest grades. Teaching is good or very good, instructions are clear and relationships are very good so that students work hard and are interested in success. Coursework is very well organised and teachers provide demanding work that offers students opportunities to show initiative by calculating energy values and checking them with data tables. Achievement in lessons is good; it is improving and this year some high achieving students are gaining high grades in module examinations.

In physics, results in A-level examinations in 2002 were well below the national average but students did better in physics than in their other subjects and results improved in 2003. Two lessons were seen: in one, teaching was good and in the other it was very good. Explanations are clear and a variety of teaching methods are used; particularly good use is made of ICT in physics teaching. Relationships are very good and students work hard and confidently. Appropriately demanding questions ensure that achievement is good and has improved. This year some high achieving students are gaining high grades in module examinations.

In geology, all students passed their A-level examinations in both 2002 and 2003 when overall grades improved and were above average. In 2002, all gained their target grade and in 2003, target grades were exceeded, sometimes by a considerable margin, so that students' achievements were good.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievements in lessons are now good.
- Teaching is imaginative and motivates students who work hard, although the pace of some lessons is only satisfactory.
- Relationships in lessons are very good and students confidently ask and answer questions.
- Target setting and support is very effective; students are well informed and confident in their teacher.
- In past A-level examinations, students have not gained the grades they were capable of.
- Teachers make very good use of ICT but students do not use it often enough during lessons.

Commentary

157. A-level results in 2002 were very low compared with the national average and nearly half failed the examination. Results improved only a little in 2003; all passed although the majority gained low grades. In 2003, coursework for the AS examination was not marked accurately and module test scores were well below what was expected. This was an unsatisfactory situation which the school has made great efforts to improve and has done so successfully. A new head of department has reorganised coursework arrangements, students have repeated module examinations, and records of marks, including the new coursework, show that students are expected to gain grades that exceed their targets. This represents good

achievement that is due to the dedication of the teacher in providing classes after school and support for students as they repeat their AS level work.

158. In lessons, standards in Year 12 are below average and in Year 13 they are above average. In Year 12, explanations of transport systems in plants were not detailed enough, but in a lesson about the heart, practical skills were good and students' understanding was about average. In lessons about genetics in Year 13, students had a clear understanding of the causes of changes in gene pools that is above average. Students' records of work and past paper questions show achievement at grades A and B for the best students. Boys and girls do equally well and students with special educational needs are very well supported.
159. Teaching and learning are good in both years and in some lessons they are very good. Teaching methods are interesting and imaginative and, particularly in Year 13, they are demanding, for example students are expected to understand and explain the causes of genetic drift. During work about the heart, students are expected to develop good practical skills and to understand the adaptations of the heart. In both years, this ensures that students' achievements are good. Relationships are always very good, students are regularly encouraged and given credit for their efforts, as a result they work hard, they have confidence in their teacher and their learning is good. An interactive whiteboard is used very effectively to make instructions clear. At times, too long is spent collecting data, leaving insufficient time for analysis. In Year 12, students need better guidance to improve their presentations.
160. Until recently, leadership and management were unsatisfactory; currently both are good. Senior managers have supported the department well and the new head of the department provides good leadership in improving teaching and organisation. Standards have risen; teaching plans and teamwork are being improved. A bridging course combines biology, geography and geology to introduce students to A-level work. Recruitment is improving; almost all students will complete their course and all are confident in their teacher. Marking, record keeping and support for students are all very good, reviews ensure students know what their target grades are and their notes are well organised and useful. Recent progress is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT was sampled. In the one A-level lesson observed, teaching was very good. A very good command of subject and course knowledge with effective planning, high expectations and good use of resources led to the students gaining a high level of skills and making good progress. Throughout the lesson, the students were able to meet the challenge and work independently with determination. Relationships were very good, and this had a positive impact on their learning and students have confidence in their teacher. The use of ICT across the curriculum is increasingly widespread and effective in supporting learning. In particular, there is good use of the interactive whiteboards to support teaching and learning across a number of subjects.

HUMANITIES

History and geography were inspected in detail but psychology was sampled. In psychology results in A-level examinations in 2002 and in 2003 were well below the national average and in both years a significant number of students gained fail grades. However, the appointment of a new teacher has led to very good improvement. Teaching is good; there are very good relationships in the classroom, teaching is well planned, explanations are clear and students are well motivated. Achievement is good, although in the one lesson seen students did not have opportunities to research.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching is leading to very good learning in the current Years 12 and 13.
- Teachers and students share a strong commitment to reaching high standards.
- The large numbers of students opting to study history are evidence of its popularity.

Commentary

161. Results at A-level have been above average in recent years. In 2003, five students gained the highest A or B grades and 16 of the 17 who entered passed. This represented very good achievement. This was similar to the very good A-level results in 2002 when seven students achieved the highest A or B grades and all 15 who entered passed. History has remained a very popular subject at A-level over the past four years. At AS level in 2003, 22 of the 25 students gained pass grades, with seven achieving the highest grades A and B. A very positive aspect was that nine students were awarded an A grade for their coursework. This represented good achievement for these students. This followed the good results in 2002 when all students passed. History remains a very popular subject in the sixth form with 25 students in the current Year 12.
162. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of work in the current Years 12 and 13 confirm that the standards they are attaining are well above average and that this represents very good achievement for them all. Students demonstrate an increasing ability to analyse the past, such as the Year 13 students who reached an accurate and well-supported assessment of the Duke of Somerset's abilities as ruler of England. Students are very committed and work very well independently. They speak with enthusiasm about the different periods they are studying and the variety of ways of working. They are clearly enjoying their history. Teacher marking gives students very good guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of their work and also the students themselves show an increasing ability to accurately assess themselves. This is clearly contributing to their high standards.
163. The teaching of history is very good and based on a strong command of the subject. Strong features of this are very good planning and questioning. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, the teacher had planned for students to work in small groups on different aspects of the early part of the reign of Henry VIII and the rise to power of Cardinal Wolsey. Each group's task, a different aspect, was well matched to their ability. Each had a set of statements to test against two textbook chapters. These forced the students to read very carefully, to discuss and work out for themselves which statements were accurate. The whole picture was then quickly drawn together leaving the students with a very good understanding of the significance of the two men. Relationships between students and teachers are very good, creating an atmosphere where students are confident to test out their own ideas and take risks.
164. The leadership and management of history are very good. Teaching is underpinned by good planning in the schemes of work, with opportunities for overlaps between different options being well exploited. The introduction of the new courses has been successfully achieved.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is a strength of the school.
- Examination results have been good with well above average numbers achieving high grades.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good with some that is excellent.
- Developments in teaching methods and high standards of expectation make for a quality learning experience for students which encourages excellence.
- The current uptake of students into Years 12 and 13 is surprisingly small considering the success the department achieves.

Commentary

165. At A-level, performance has been in line with the national average. The number of candidates achieving grade A is impressive, reflecting the high quality experience students receive. Predicted grades for this year indicate the possibility of all students gaining the highest grades for A-level and 100 per cent success at AS level in Year 12.
166. Standards seen in the current Year 13 are well above average, and achievement is very good. Notes are comprehensively but selectively made and work is systematically recorded to show that students transfer what they are taught into their own learning. High standards are expected and the variety of methods used to teach and to learn is shown well. Particularly effective are the resumes on tests and investigative assignments which indicate to students where they currently stand and the finer points needed to produce the next grade.
167. Teaching is very good overall with some of it outstanding, reflecting the high expectations and standards of the subject specialist staff. They are experienced practitioners who are transforming their teaching methods through the introduction of new technology. Lessons on periglacial landscapes or urban change in Birmingham were excellent examples. Teachers plan interesting lessons encouraging a variety of learning strategies to develop greater interest, understanding and geographical skill. The pace and challenge in lessons are very good and therefore all aspects of the syllabus get covered thoroughly. Fieldwork is well developed, used as an integral component and is an additional strength. Consequently, learning is quick, shows subject commitment, dedication and work to high levels of performance. Several students intend to take the subject on to university level. Attitudes and behaviour are exemplary, confirming very good relationships.
168. The leadership and management of the head of department are very good indeed. The head of department has a clear vision and expectation for the subject which are shared by his specialist team. The recent advances in teaching techniques, increasing the range of learning methods so that all students understand often difficult concepts more readily, are a tribute to the department's work. Administration is exemplary with a position statement, analysis of examinations, student performance and a well-constructed improvement plan. The subject clearly benefits from the profile of the head of department in terms of his work nationally.
169. The department is aware of reduced uptake in recent years, the potential consequences of small group sizes and therefore the need to raise its profile and appeal to capitalise on its very successful record in terms of examination success as well as making a greater contribution to a student's wider personal development. The absence of ICT facilities within the subject area, even networking and Internet connection, is now a serious drawback to the recent advances.
170. Since the last inspection, the department has maintained its established tradition in the pursuit of academic excellence, teaching has been significantly enhanced with the introduction of new

technology and the relationship between teaching and learning and the part assessment plays in this equation has clearly progressed and is put to good use.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and commitment from experienced and very knowledgeable teachers who cover the technical aspects of the course very well and support students' learning very effectively.
- Commitment and hard work by enthusiastic students who learn very effectively and produce very good quality coursework portfolios of an improving standard.
- Very good management which is thoughtful and effective, providing excellent leadership and direction to the subject.
- The improving resources and accommodation, including a limited space for private study.

Commentary

171. AS and A-level examinations have just been restarted in both product design and food technology. At AS level, results have been very good, all students passing, and with five out of the six candidates gaining either an A or B grade. At A-level, last year the results in product design were very good, with the six candidates gaining three A grades, one B and one C. In food technology, all four candidates passed. What is clear is that many of the students did far better than predictions might have anticipated, so students achieved very well. Standards in work seen during the inspection are well above average and students' achievements are very good.
172. All lessons start well. The theory lessons are conducted at a fast pace with very high expectation of both standards of theoretical, design and practical work and behaviour. Students respond well. For example, in an excellent food technology lesson, students came in, got straight onto task and produced development work which showed three different variations for part of their recipe. This was completed, the product assembled to a standard formulation, photographed and evaluated during the lesson. In theory lessons, discussions involve the whole class and students are expected to work on their own as well as in small teams to work out the answers to problems posed by the teacher and make presentations. There is good debate about the range of answers, and the teacher establishes principles that are clarified and formalised. In the coursework lessons, students get on with their tasks with great maturity. They are happy to discuss their ideas and explain their designs. Teachers evaluate their work with them and they thoughtfully take criticism and are able to transfer the issues raised into improved design solutions. Teaching and learning then are very good, and on occasions excellent. The standards of coursework are improving year on year as are the theoretical aspects of the course.
173. Improved performance results from well-prepared teaching with effective teaching materials, real expertise and a genuine commitment from the staff. In addition, students have very good relationships with each other and their teachers. This enables them to have confidence in their work and to readily accept advice and criticism. In consequence, work rapidly improves.
174. There is excellent leadership of the team of very proficient and committed teachers and day-to-day matters are managed very well. The head of department has excellent vision, leads with a sense of purpose and is supported by the senior management and the Technology College

initiative. There are high aspirations by staff and students alike. The accommodation, in terms of workshop space with appropriate machines and equipment, is good and recently refurbished and extended, but there are only limited spaces where students can 'drop in' out of taught time and continue their design work. Increasing demands on the accommodation mean that some practical work has to be carried out with other classes and this is unsatisfactory. Computer resources have improved and are sufficient to meet the specification requirements for learning about computer-aided design and manufacture at a sufficiently high level, but are not generously provided for student use. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent and signs are already in place that this will continue.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Music and drama were sampled. Standards in music have varied during the past few years and this partly reflects the wide ability range that students have. In the two lessons observed, standards in both Year 12 and Year 13 were above average with students showing very good prior knowledge of musical terms and styles. Students in a Year 13 lesson showed very good knowledge of augmented chords and their resolution and in a Year 12 lesson, ICT was used well to support a composing task on a set of variations.

In drama, standards have improved in the work seen at A-level because students are now better prepared for the written elements of the course. Results at A-level in 2003 were average and achievement was satisfactory. Standards in the AS level examination at the end of Year 12 were above average and achievement was good. In the teaching observed, learning was characterised by high expectations, clear explanations and challenging questions.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Leisure and tourism was sampled. In the one Year 12 lesson observed on tourist destinations, although standards were below average, very good teaching, with a sharp focus on expanding horizons and achieving examination success, was leading to some enthusiastic involvement and very good achievement.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students' achievement is very good.
- There are no timetabled opportunities for non-examination students to take part in physical recreation.

Commentary

175. There are currently eleven students in Year 13 continuing with A-level and eleven students in Year 12 following the AS course. In the 2003 examinations, all students entered for AS and A-level gained pass grades. The AS results were particularly good with almost 50 per cent obtaining A-B grades. Analysis by the department shows evidence of good added value.
176. Standards of attainment amongst students currently in Years 12 are above average overall. Students show a good understanding of anatomy and physiology but are less confident when discussing aspects of the history of sport. Within a wide ability range most students have made good progress since they started the course and they are achieving very well. Students

have a good range of practical skills in a variety of activities, including football, hockey, netball and swimming. Standards in Year 13 are well above average and students' achievements are very good. Students are very confident in talking about different aspects of their studies. The majority are eager to answer questions and they have an accurate recall of earlier work. Their folders are well organised and show clearly that the requirements of the syllabus are being met. They show a good depth of knowledge and understanding about topical issues. Students demonstrate above average ability in their chosen practical activities. These include athletics, badminton, dance and tennis.

177. The quality of teaching is very good. This has a significant impact on students' learning. Topics are frequently introduced in an imaginative and creative way. This was evident, for example, in lessons on both sport psychology and physiology. Mutual respect between teachers and students creates an effective and supportive learning environment. Most students work with interest and commitment. In some lessons, very good use is made of ICT, including PowerPoint presentations.
178. Good leadership and management have contributed to the successful implementation of the AS and A-level courses for several years. Examination students are encouraged to help younger students in different activities. However, there is no timetabled provision for all other sixth form students to take part in any recreational activities or to undertake any accredited courses such as coaching or refereeing.

BUSINESS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very effective start to the new AS and A-level examinations enables students to achieve well.
- Teaching is very good and often excellent, allowing all students to achieve well and make very good progress.
- Computers are well used in lessons as a tool for learning and recording students' class and coursework, but are not available in every lesson.
- Excellent leadership, which is charismatic and thoughtful, provides clear direction for the subject, and provides an environment where all students are valued and respected by both staff and other students.

Commentary

179. In earlier years, students' A-level performance was low by national standards and in comparison to their other subjects. However, things improved dramatically in 2003 with all seven students passing, three gaining either an A or B grade and being in the group of most successful results in the school. At AS level, the results for the 14 candidates entered were more variable; 12 passed, and although there was a good number gaining C, there was an absence of the highest grades.
180. The GCSE results for last year's Year 11 was above both school and national averages. However, not all students following sixth form courses have previously studied business studies. Standards in lessons seen are above average in Year 12, although some students are new to the subject. In Year 13, standards are well above average, where students build very effectively on their prior learning. Their achievement is very good.
181. All lessons start well. There is crisp introduction with a clear set of expectations of both standards of work and behaviour. The lessons are conducted at a fast pace with a good range of different activities in each lesson. There are constant small questions and challenges which

consolidate and develop learning. The coursework tasks are set with clear deadlines. These deadlines are to be kept and teachers support their development with good one-to-one discussions as well as in small groups. Teaching and learning are always very good and often really excellent. Teachers are enthusiasts and are energetic and hardworking in their teaching. There is a sense of humour in the lessons and this was evidenced when the class dreamed up new products. The teacher set the tone starting with trousers that changed colour when you wanted and a student replying with his playground for one person with an automatic swing and a self-balancing see-saw!

182. The improved performance results from well-prepared teaching with effective teaching materials, innovative use of the new interactive whiteboard and real expertise, together with a genuine commitment from the staff. Assessment and marking is helpful to students, and of excellent quality on a one-to-one basis. Students' relationships with their teachers are very good and those who need additional help are given it willingly. Students appreciate the openness of discussion and the care teachers exhibit.
183. There is excellent leadership of the team of proficient teachers and day-to-day matters are managed very well. The head of department has clarity of vision and leads with a real sense of purpose, and there are high aspirations by staff and students alike. The resources in terms of computers and learning materials are good, but some lessons take place in rooms that do not have ICT equipment. The Year 12 class is excessively large and this limits the level of support that can be given to individuals, with a consequent risk to standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent and, with the new management and the commitment from the school, signs are already in place that this rate of progress will continue.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

