

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BROXBOURNE SCHOOL

Broxbourne

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117529

Headteacher: Martin Titchmarsh

Lead inspector: Clare Gillies

Dates of inspection: 19th to 22nd January 2004

Inspection number: 259235

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils and students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils and students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1289
School address:	High Road Broxbourne Hertfordshire
Postcode:	EN10 7DD
Telephone number:	01992 411060
Fax number:	01992 411061
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Shawyer
Date of previous inspection:	11 th May 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This larger than average school includes a growing sixth form, which now has 239 students. There are about 20 more boys than girls in total although in Years 7 and 13 girls outnumber boys. It is a Business and Enterprise Specialist School. Many pupils and students are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The school has been awarded Investor in People (IIP), Artsmark Gold, a School Achievement Award, Sportsmark Gold and the Charter Mark (Prime Minister's Cabinet Office for exceptional public service) and has applied for the British Council International School Award. The school is used by the community for adult evening classes and social, sporting and cultural activities. The percentage of pupils on the school's special educational needs register, including those with statements, is below average. The range of special educational needs is wide and includes speech and language difficulties, autism and hearing impairments, and the school is designated as one for pupils with physical and neurological impairment. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English and very few do not speak English as their mother tongue. The great majority of pupils is white. The overall socio-economic background of the pupils is above average and their standard of attainment on entry to the school is average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities*
20597	Mrs C Gillies	Lead inspector	
8992	Mr J Vischer	Lay inspector	
33672	Mr J Fowler	Team inspector	English
20527	Mr B King	Team inspector	Mathematics
5241	Dr C Millband	Team inspector	Science
1782	Mr A Lyons	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
31685	Mrs V Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
27351	Mr M Stanton	Team inspector	Design and technology
31863	Mr A Cornelius	Team inspector	Geography
30216	Mr A Elliott	Team inspector	History Citizenship
32115	Mr J Foster	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
11672	Mr P Harle	Team inspector	Music
18888	Mrs J Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education
16930	Mr J Plumb	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs
30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English in the sixth form Drama
6138	Mr K Page	Team inspector	Mathematics in the sixth form
19043	Mr D Lewis	Team inspector	Chemistry in the sixth form
10807	Mr P Quest	Team inspector	Religious education in the sixth form
25551	Mr A Hodge	Team inspector	Business studies

* Subjects inspected in depth - most other subjects were sampled.

The inspection contractor was:

Bench Marque Limited

National Westminster Bank Chambers
Victoria Street
Burnham-on-Sea
Somerset
TA8 1AN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AND STUDENTS	10
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	15
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	24
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	61

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is very good with some excellent features.

Standards are well above average, pupils and students achieve very well, teaching and learning are very good and the quality of care, support and guidance is excellent. Parents, pupils and students are rightly very proud to be members of the school community. **The school provides very good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Test and examination results are well above average and pupils achieve very well, whatever their ability. Present standards of work and progress are just as high.
- Pupils know, rightly, that the staff are extremely dedicated and that they work together very happily; this is a key factor behind the excellent, harmonious relationships at all levels.
- Teaching is very good. During the inspection it was very good or better in nearly half the lessons seen. Many lessons, particularly the starter activities, are interesting, lively and fun and it is striking how many parents, pupils and students comment on the high quality of teaching. The school has a very good number of effective non-teaching staff.
- The headteacher is an excellent leader who is extremely well supported by a most effective senior management team. Heads of departments and pastoral heads give very good leadership and the management of the school is most efficient and effective.
- The governors are alert, hardworking and thoughtful. They contribute much to the school's success and growth.
- All pupils are cared for extremely well as staff pay close attention to each individual's needs. In response, pupils feel very safe and content and their behaviour is very good. The advice, guidance and support they receive are excellent.
- A particular feature of the very good curriculum is the excellent wealth of extra-curricular activities. These are particularly strong in outdoor activities, sport and music. The number of pupils and students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is outstanding. The learning resource centre is a valuable asset.
- Statutory requirements, some noted in the last report, remain in information and communication technology and religious education in Years 10 and 11.

The school's effectiveness has improved very well since its last inspection. Standards have gone up considerably over the last six years and the sixth form has grown. Monitoring of the quality of provision is now rigorous and effective and a key factor in the school's success. The school is reflective and its self-evaluation is of a very high quality. Teaching has improved, as has the accommodation.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A* - very high (the top five per cent of schools in England); 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.

Overall, **achievement is very good** and standards are well above average in all years. Test and examination results, related to pupils' standards when they enter the school, confirm that they make very good progress between Years 7 and 11 and in the sixth form. Girls do better than boys but by no greater margin than that seen nationally.

End of Year 9 test results have gone up each year since 2000. They were well above average in 2003. Since 2001, the school has specifically focused on improving performance at the higher levels,

with success particularly in mathematics and English. Pupils with learning difficulties, those with statements of special educational needs and the very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make very good progress.

The average GCSE points score was the best ever in 2003 – practically all pupils attained five GCSE A*-G grades and almost 80 per cent of pupils attained five A*-C grades, of whom half attained ten. Results were above average in every subject taken in 2003 and in some subjects the percentage of A*/A grades was very high. Results were very high compared to similar schools – reflected in the A* grade shown above.

Since 2000, even though the number of students has increased, sixth-form results have been well above average.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. They are interested in most lessons and enthusiastic about all the extra-curricular activities. Their attitudes to all aspects of school life and their behaviour are also very good. Attendance is well above average and punctuality to school is good. Punctuality to lessons is a problem as the buildings cover a large area.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The quality of teaching is very good. The quality of learning is very good.

Teaching is characterised by lively starters (but not quite such good endings) in lessons, enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers and excellent relationships, matched by pupils' and students' willingness to learn and work hard.

The curriculum is very good, particularly the breadth of choice in the sixth form and the wide range of out-of-school activities, trips and visits. Weaknesses relate to too little information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education for some pupils in Years 10 and 11 and the coherence of citizenship covered in Years 7 to 11.

Care, guidance and support are excellent with great attention given to the needs of all individuals. The school's partnership with parents is very good and parents are extremely supportive and impressed with all that the school offers. The school's partnership with the community is very good and growing. Helpful links with primary schools exist for literacy, numeracy and French.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are very good. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. He is very well supported by a strong senior management team and by heads of departments and pastoral heads who work hard to maintain high standards at the same time as focusing on supporting all pupils. Management is very good and most efficient. Learning support assistants and administration staff contribute much to the school's success. The work of the governing body is very good. Members bring a valuable range of expertise to their work. They tackle their responsibilities diligently and are fully aware of the school's strengths and areas needing improvement, and that statutory requirements are not met in all areas.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are extremely satisfied with the school and believe it provides a high quality of education. They sing the school's praises. Pupils and students also rate the school very highly and are very complimentary about the teachers and the education they receive. They are all happy to be members of the school community.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are all related to statutory requirements:

- Deliver the full locally agreed syllabus for religious education to all pupils and students in Years 10 to 13. Introduce a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.
- Cover the full National Curriculum requirements for ICT for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Develop further the full National Curriculum in citizenship in Years 7 to 11.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. Its cost-effectiveness is very good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A-level and AVCE examination results are well above average and students make very good progress. Practically all students proceed to university and attain the grades they need to go to their first choice for higher education.
- As in the main school, students have excellent relationships with each other, younger pupils and teachers. They are most appreciative of the teaching and the excellent care, guidance and support they receive.
- Teaching is very good. During the inspection it was at least very good or better in almost three out of five lessons and several examples of outstanding practice were seen.
- The head of sixth form, extremely well supported by the headteacher, senior management team and the governing body, provides very good, effective leadership.
- Students can choose from a very good range of subjects, including A-levels and vocational courses. The statutory requirements for religious education are not met for those students who do not study the subject for A-level.

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 literature: very good. Well above average standards. Very good teaching and learning. Students' maturity and commitment ensure that they achieve very well. Very good leadership and management. French: good. Well above average standards and very good achievement. Very good teaching and learning. Work experience in France means that students understand French very well. Very good leadership and management.
Mathematics	Mathematics: good. Above average standards. Good teaching, learning and achievement. Students apply themselves well but do not use ICT enough. Very good leadership and good management.
Science	Chemistry: good. Above average standards and good achievement. Good teaching and learning. Students are keen to progress because they regard the subject as fun. Very good leadership and good management.
Information and communication technology	AVCE ICT: good. Above average standards. Good teaching, learning and achievement. A new course that has got off to an encouraging start. Very good leadership and good management.
Humanities	Geography: very good. Well above average standards. Very good teaching, learning and achievement. Very popular subject. Excellent fieldwork. Very good leadership and management. Religious education: very good. Well above average standards. Very good teaching, learning and achievement. Interesting and challenging lessons. Very good leadership and management.
Visual and performing arts and media	Art: very good. Well above average standards. Good teaching, learning and very good achievement. A strong focus on multiculturalism. Very good leadership and management. Drama: very good. Well above average standards, especially in performance. Very good teaching, learning and achievement. Inspiring teaching, impressive studio facilities and an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities. Very good leadership and management.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical education: good. Above average standards, particularly in performance. Very good teaching and learning and good achievement. Significant success in many sports. Very good leadership and management.
Business	Business studies: good. Above average standards. Good teaching, learning and achievement. Valuable links with a large bank. Very good leadership and management.
Other subjects	German, biology, physics, history, government and politics, sociology, product design, media studies, music and general studies were sampled. Teaching in these subjects was predominantly very good and students were achieving very well.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Advice, guidance and support for students are excellent.

Before they join the sixth form and in Years 12 and 13, thorough and detailed monitoring of students' personal development and academic progress means that they settle quickly and confidently into their advanced studies. Over 90 per cent of them feel they had helpful advice about which subjects to choose and that they find the careers guidance useful. They know that there is a member of staff who would help them if they had a personal problem. They are treated as young adults and trusted to take on responsibilities as prefects and in other roles. They feel they are treated fairly and with respect. Teachers guide them towards working independently and carrying out their own research and many move on to higher education and achieve well.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is very good. Management is very good.

The head of sixth form, a key member of the senior management team, leads a strong team of form tutors extremely well and oversees the management of students' pastoral and academic development just as efficiently. The governors and headteacher are pleased about the growing numbers and success of the sixth form and support it enthusiastically. The head of the sixth form meets all students regularly, delivering the general studies course, and knows them all very well. Every student who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that the school is well run and this certainly reflects the high quality leadership of the sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are extremely positive about the school. They have very few suggestions about things they would like to see improved and 100 per cent of them agreed with the pre-inspection questionnaire statement: 'I enjoy being a student of this school'. They find the teaching challenging and demanding and are confident that the staff are experts in their subjects and always ready to help them when necessary. With so many of them involved in interests such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, it is not surprising that they are positive about enrichment activities.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AND STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Terms used: the term 'capped' average point score describes the average total points students attain for their **best eight** GCSE subjects. The average point score relates to the average total points students attain for **all** their GCSE subjects. **Value-added** describes the amount of progress students make, for example between their results at the end of Year 9 and their GCSE results two years later. Statements about **achievement** take these value-added measures into account, combined with how well students do compared to their ability.

Standards overall are well above average in all years. They have risen since the last inspection. Achievement overall is very good in all years.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The percentage of pupils attaining above the expected level at the end of Year 9 has gone up considerably since 2001. It is well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science.
- GCSE, A-level and AVCE results have been well above average for three years.
- For the last five years, based on their prior attainment, pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11 has been well above that seen nationally.
- A range of value-added measures consistently confirms that pupils do much better than expected.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.

Commentary

1. End of Year 9 test results have gone up each year since 2000, and the trend has been above that seen nationally. In 2003, over four out of five pupils reach the expected level (Level 5) in English, mathematics and science and the percentage of pupils attaining the higher levels improved considerably, hence the rise in the points score shown below. Since 2001, the school has specifically focused on improving performance at the higher levels, with success. In 2003, over 60 per cent of pupils reached Level 6 and above in mathematics, over 50 per cent in English and just under 50 per cent in science. Six per cent of pupils reached the highest level, Level 8, in mathematics. The school sets challenging targets which it meets or exceeds. Present standards of work are well above average overall.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.7 (35.2)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	38.1 (37.9)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.3 (35.0)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 212 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. Pupils with learning difficulties make very good progress in reading, spelling and writing because of the very good learning support they receive in lessons. They achieve very well in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with very weak verbal language are given extra help away from some lessons. In one session seen, a Year 7 pupil developed very good phonic skills and gained in confidence as a reader.

3. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs also make very good progress. Because of the high quality support he received, a pupil with complex speech and language difficulties grasped and understood how to use a command by the end of a lesson, successfully making eye contact with his teacher when speaking. In a swimming lesson, a pupil made very good progress in developing social skills and improving breaststroke because the instructor fully included the pupil in the session.

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	79 (66)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (95)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	42.7 (40.3)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 201 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. GCSE results were particularly high in 2001 and, after a predicted dip because of lower prior attainment, they picked up again in 2003 to almost the same level. The trend in the school's average point score since 1999 has been in line with that seen nationally. The average point score was the best ever in 2003. In this year practically all pupils attained five GCSE A*-G grades and almost 80 per cent of pupils attained five or more A*-C grades. Over half of these pupils attained ten. The table below shows that results were above average in every subject taken in 2003 and that in some the percentage of A*/A grades was very high. As in Year 9, the school sets realistic GCSE targets which it has exceeded in recent years.

GCSE Results 2002 and 2003 (percentage with grades A*-C), girls in brackets

	2002	National 2003	2003	Comments
English language	75 (82)	58	78 (85)	About one in five A*/A grades in both
English literature	88 (92)	63	86 (92)	
Mathematics	58 (59)	48	71 (71)	Below average A*
Science (double)	64 (67)	51	64 (64)	Just above national A*/A
Art and design	86 (96)	65	84 (95)	One-third A*/A grades
French	86 (96)	45	96 (99)	Taken by 145 pupils
Geography	73 (75)	58	70 (74)	One in three A*/A
German	58 (67)	51	86 (86)	
History	70 (81)	60	85 (97)	46% grades A*/A.
Drama		65	78 (79)	No A* but 28% grade A
Music	90 (88)	68	100	60% A*/A grades
Design & technology	55 (63)	53	68 (80)	
Physical education	59 (71)	55	65 (72)	Below average A*
Religious education	59 (71)	59	100 (93)	56% A*/A
Business studies	51 (67)	55	79 (85)	No A* but one in five A grades
Child development	60 (60)	n/a	64 (64)	

5. Detailed analysis of results (see paragraph 27) against prior attainment means that the school highlights where pupils do particularly well, or could do even better. Relative to their other subjects, in 2003 pupils performed extremely well in French, business studies, history and textiles and, against their predicted grades, pupils' results were very strong in these subjects and in religious education and child development. Girls do better than boys, but the gap between them is the same as that seen nationally. Data shows that boys make their best progress in Years 10 and 11, particularly in English and mathematics.

6. The very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve just as well as others, and in some cases, better. This was also observed in all subjects during the inspection. Pupils with special educational needs continue to make very good progress. As a result of the combined and skilful team work of his teacher and learning support assistant, a Year 10 statemented pupil was fully included in a role-play about *Macbeth* and made rapid gains in understanding the story. Pupils with talents in sports, art, drama and music are encouraged to achieve very highly and most of them do. Those with academic gifts do attain high GCSE grades, but not in mathematics, hence the department has introduced masterclasses for higher ability girls in Years 10 and 11.
7. During the inspection, in Years 7 to 11 standards were well above average overall. They were well above average in English, French, German, geography, history, religious education, art and design and music. Standards were very high in textiles. Pupils achieve very well in these subjects. Standards were above average in mathematics, science, ICT, food technology, resistant materials, graphics, child development and physical education, and average in business studies. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics and physical education and well in science, ICT, food technology, resistant materials, graphics, business studies and child development.

Sixth form

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	98.5 (96.2)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	38.7 (27.5)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	328 (304.1)	283.3 (254.5)

There were 134 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

In 2003 Key Skills points were included in the average points scores.

8. Since 2001, even though the number of students has increased, sixth-form results have been well above average. Students add to their A-level and AVCE points by performing well in Key Skills tests. Overall value added, related to students' GCSE performance, confirms very high achievement in both 2002 and 2003. Performance against predicted grades for individual subjects fluctuates, but it has been consistently at least as good as expected and often above, as it was in 2003. In 2003, four students achieved A-level marks in the top ten in the country in geography and general studies. Consistently above average results are attained in art, AVCE business studies, chemistry, general studies and religious education. Girls do better than boys, but by no greater margin than that seen nationally.
9. During the inspection, standards were well above average overall and in English literature, French, geography, religious education, AVCE business studies, art and drama, students achieve very well. Standards are above average and students achieve well in A-level business studies, chemistry, mathematics, physical education and ICT. Other sixth-form subjects were not examined in depth.

Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' and students' attitudes are excellent. Their behaviour is excellent. Attendance is very good and punctuality is good. Pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students have excellent relationships with others and their interest in school life and the wide range of activities offered is also excellent.
- Pupils and students are confident and have high self-esteem.
- The school promotes good relationships extremely well and sets very high expectations for pupils' and students' conduct.
- The school deals with all forms of harassment extremely effectively.
- Students' willingness to be enterprising and to take on responsibility is exceptional.
- Students' attitudes to sixth-form work and school life in general are excellent.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	5.8	School data :	0.5
National data:	7.2	National data:	1.1

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

- Attendance is very good and unauthorised absences are consistently low. This reflects parents' keen efforts to ensure their children attend as well as pupils' very positive attitudes to school life. Punctuality at the start of day is good but in lessons it varies considerably, depending on the distance pupils have to travel between classrooms on the long site. In very wet weather the time taken can be even longer due to the large number of puddles, some of which are very broad.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes are reflected in the way they get on with each other and with adults. The very high quality of relationships is seen in the way pupils trust each other and in how they take turns using equipment without the slightest prompting, for example in design and technology. In relating with adults, the same level of respect is seen. For example, in history much good humour infiltrates the lessons; or in casually passing the headteacher, students may jokingly test him about some abstruse and specialised knowledge they have just learnt. They are happy and cheerful around the school and carry out their duties carefully and thoughtfully. When it comes to helping to organise activities such as the house plays, members of each year group are very keen to play their part. In lessons too, they are enthusiastic and highly committed. They work well collaboratively and put their mind to the task in hand. In physical education, pupils are especially willing to be totally involved and are very keen to represent the school.

<p>Significant personal development through outdoor activities, especially the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme</p> <p>Huge numbers of boys and girls of all abilities, previous students and staff are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award: currently 163 pupils in Years 10 and 11 taking the bronze award and 74 students in Years 12 and 13 striving for gold. The element of community service gives pupils a strong sense of responsibility and pupils are encouraged to be independent in their choice of where to give help. Year 8 pupils are introduced to outdoor pursuits in an activity trip organised each summer and there is an annual visit abroad for older pupils to a world mountain range which is often the Alps, but this year is the Rockies. Each year a Mountain Aid event is organised in the Lake District which raises money for a local charity. Teams of pupils led by former students with a gold award, walk and climb nine peaks. This year 130 pupils and staff were involved and raised £9,400. The overall contribution made to pupils' and students' personal development is tremendous and they recognise the major benefits they have gained through taking part in these activities and expeditions.</p>
--

- From the headteacher to the librarian, or the learning support assistants to the business manager, all staff promote positive behaviour by setting very good role models, and by expecting pupils to be independent and considerate and to conform to the rules. These high

expectations for pupils' conduct are therefore quite naturally promoted through example without an over-reliance on rewards and sanctions. However, the generally very orderly and calm atmosphere of the school belies the fact that incidents of misbehaviour do occur. These are dealt with very effectively through detailed consideration of the causes, coupled with time out in the newly set up inclusion unit for more serious offences. The few permanent exclusions, carefully considered by the governing body, are close to the statistical average for the size of school. The small number of fixed-term exclusions is being reduced through the use of the very effective internal unit. At all levels of pastoral care, the rare incidents of bullying are taken seriously and dealt with quickly. Very few racist incidents have been recorded but again, these are dealt with firmly. The school successfully promotes racial harmony and respect.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	778	33	1
White – Irish	8	0	0
White – any other White background	45	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	1	1
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	8	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	5	0	0
Black or Black British – African	8	0	0
Chinese	11	0	0
Any other ethnic group	47	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	355	0	0

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

13. Pupils with complex or challenging behavioural difficulties are kept focused on their work and behave well because teachers and learning support assistants are so skilled in meeting their needs – they make very good progress. The learning support assistants often exercise immense patience with pupils. Those pupils lacking social skills, who do not understand the impact of their behaviour on others, are particularly well managed and fully included in lessons. Because of the high quality support they receive, pupils with special educational needs gain in confidence and self-esteem and this in turn contributes extremely well to their personal development. Because their teachers know what makes them tick, and because relationships are excellent, these students are prepared to take risks in lessons. They often surprise themselves with the improvements they make, seen in a Year 8 religious education lesson on the story of Jesus' temptation, for example.

14. Religious education lessons contribute significantly to all pupils' awareness and consideration of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding of six major religions in Years 7 to 9 and discuss the importance of tolerance in their own lives. Those pupils who do not take religious education for GCSE do not have such depth of spiritual understanding as those who do. Pupils thoughtfully consider self-awareness in many subjects, particularly the performing arts, though assemblies include limited time for reflection. The

personal, social and health education (PSHE)/citizenship days cover a wealth of issues related to pupils' personal development (see paragraphs 138 to 142).

15. Moral and social values are fundamental to the ethos of the school and pupils know right from wrong and the importance of respect, trust and accountability. Assemblies regularly focus on the importance of valuing each individual and appreciating the differences between them – a key message that the headteacher regularly addresses, emphasising that if anyone makes a thoughtless remark about size, gender, faith, colour or race, for example, 'then they're straight into the inclusion unit'. The school is very active in encouraging pupils' cultural development and appreciation of other nations, races and religions and this pervades the work of all departments. Pupils respond sensitively in discussions considering these issues. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to gain first-hand experience of the richness of cultural diversity to be found amongst people with different ethnic backgrounds from theirs.

Sixth form

16. Students are extremely positive about their sixth form and above all about the school. Most have come right through from Year 7. Their complete acceptance of losing half their recreational space to the temporary need for examination accommodation is a fine example of their commitment. They are proud of their own sixth-form block and very pleased that it is centrally situated at the heart of the school. They are very well motivated and in practically all lessons their attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Their attendance is very good.
17. Students organise fundraising for charity and the sixth-form council runs its own entertainment agenda. Year 13 students are instrumental in passing on their skills to Year 12 students. In the running and organising of the house plays their role is crucial and extremely positive. They, like staff, set the example of very high standards as role models for pupil members of the houses. The many sports teams, music concerts and choirs, drama performances and theatre visits provide invaluable social and cultural experiences. The easy willingness with which Year 13 students carry out their duties as senior prefects is critical to ensuring that all prefects very effectively maintain the good running of the school.
18. As in the main school, students are considerate of others' needs and interests and the school fosters such understanding and respect. Students work very well together and are terrific ambassadors for their school, both in the local community and in their trips abroad, such as those to France, Germany and Canada. In general studies, students examine ethical, moral and social issues and they are confident expressing their personal views and listening to others. As in the main school, the PSHE/citizenship days support students' personal development very well.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good because all elements of provision are of a consistently high quality. The quality of education provided in the sixth form is very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The quality of assessment of pupils' work is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- During the inspection in the school as a whole, teaching was very good or better in almost half the lessons seen. It was excellent in 19 lessons.

- Teaching is very effective in the sixth form.
- The school's focus on making learning interesting and fun was evident in many lessons.
- Assessment is secure with very good systems for tracking pupils' and students' progress and responding to their needs.
- Teachers make it very clear what is expected from pupils in lessons and homework.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how to improve because most teachers give them effective feedback.
- In lessons, starter activities are often excellent but the review and reflection on learning at the end are not always so effective.

Commentary

19. The school is determined that teaching and learning will be its key focus at all times. In the school improvement plan, it set a goal of 75 per cent of lessons during the present academic year being taught well, and a third being very good or better. These percentage figures were exceeded during the inspection, so the teaching and learning working group, with well over 20 teachers involved, can feel proud of its impact. This group has produced an excellent handbook which contains a wealth of practical and interesting suggestions about how to start and end lessons, different activities for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners, seating arrangements, and many other areas. The staff library contains relevant up-to-date literature on thinking skills and learning styles.
20. Key features of successful lessons, such as teachers' relationships with pupils, their understanding of how to pose questions and knowledge of examination criteria are described in paragraphs 28 to 30. The starter activities, seen in many lessons in Years 7 to 11, were extremely effective and resulted in pupils being interested and ready to move on to new work. In most cases, well-prepared starters were followed by equally punchy lessons. Examples included:
- high quality colour pictures of components in Year 11 textiles so pupils could visualise what they were preparing;
 - visual clues of relevant artefacts to the content of a Year 7 religious education lesson;
 - deciphering mathematical codes in Year 11;
 - reading a list of activities banned by the government during the First World War and getting Year 9 pupils to decide what was surprising or what was expected;
 - throwing a toy to Year 7 pupils whilst posing questions in French. Pupils sit down after they've responded, so all of them are alert and involved;
 - making revision fun using word cards for Indian music in Year 11 and flash cards with notes and time values in Year 7;
 - warm-up and stretching sessions for physical education that link explicitly with the activity that follows;
 - dramatic use of PowerPoint to gain pupils' attention in ICT;
 - reading out quotations in English followed by 'Who said what?' for Year 9 pupils;
 - generating ideas from pupils about academic, comic or easy-to-read advertisements in Year 10 graphics, leading into work on sound bites reflecting the market;
 - bingo-type activities to check pupils' understanding in religious education; and
 - pupils having to come up with French words to do with towns as they go through the alphabet.
21. Some teachers use their dramatic skills to engage pupils and make them think. Use of short extracts read imaginatively in English, such as from *Jaws*, to help pupils generate tension in their writing, were particularly effective. Members of the history department act out roles to bring the subject alive and encourage pupils to empathise with the lives of people they are studying. Geography teachers get pupils to take on roles, for example discussing fair trade and related issues. Religious education lessons also involve pupils in acting out stories, for example the temptation of Jesus in Year 8.

22. Despite examples of strong practice, in general, the endings of lessons were not as effective as the beginnings. Sometimes teachers ran out of time, so the amount of reflection was limited. On other occasions, teachers summarised what had been taught, not necessarily the same thing as what had been learned, rather than getting pupils to explain and discuss what they had gained from the lesson, in terms of their thinking, understanding and knowledge.
23. The table below confirms that teaching was very good or better in over two out of five lessons seen in Years 7 to 11. It was consistently very good in German, music and religious education and always good or better in geography and physical education. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in these subjects and in English, mathematics, science and French. When lessons were not successful, it was either because teachers went so fast and energetically that some pupils could not keep up, or the opposite: too long spent on the same activity.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 139 lessons in Years 7 to 11

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
13 (9%)	48 (35%)	50 (36%)	25 (18%)	3 (2%)	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages.

24. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teachers plan flexibly to meet their needs and make very good use of the specific targets on their individual education plans, both to inform their planning when working with these pupils and also to monitor their progress. They ensure that these pupils are very productive and make very good progress in acquiring new skills. Pupils' individual education plans have specific literacy, numeracy and behavioural targets. Teachers and learning support assistants operate as a very effective team to ensure that all pupils are fully included in lesson activities. On very rare occasions, teachers do not structure work carefully enough for each individual in the lower ability groups.
25. For gifted and talented pupils, each department has generated its own list and this is co-ordinated across year groups. Masterclasses in art and mathematics are successfully challenging selected pupils to reach their potential and the performing arts and physical education departments certainly spot those with talents and give them opportunities to excel. In other subjects provision is variable, with some fine examples of different or further work for gifted pupils but also a number of lessons where they did the same as others and could have done more, for example in mathematics, science and geography.
26. Pupils' work is assessed thoroughly with pupils receiving supporting comments from their teachers highlighting areas for improvement. The school has sensibly adopted a realistic plan for marking – light touch for some exercises and then detailed comments on selected key pieces of work. Pupils understand this and it works well. Lessons frequently include the teacher asking effective questions so that they can check pupils' understanding and exemplify specific points. Pupils self-assess their work which also reinforces their own understanding of their personal targets for improvement.
27. A deputy headteacher produces an excellent document, called 'How well are we doing?', which is regularly updated with reference to a wealth of present and past pupils' performance data. Statistics are analysed meticulously against national and value-added figures. As this is circulated to all staff, they can pick up specific points and respond to them. For example, the school knows that a few boys who attained a particular point score in their end of Year 9 national tests slightly under-performed in GCSE art graphics. All departments have specific plans to tackle such individuals.

Sixth form

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 60 lessons in Years 12 and 13

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
6 (10%)	29 (49%)	19 (31%)	6 (10%)	0	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages.

28. In Section C of this report, it is striking how many of the subjects, especially those for the sixth form, highlight how very well the teachers know their students. This is in addition to highlighting the teachers' enthusiasm and academic experience in their subjects. In the student questionnaires, 99 per cent of them agreed that their teachers are accessible and helpful if they have difficulties with their work and that they find the teaching challenging and demanding. The excellent relationships such attitudes generate are a major reason why students learn well. Teachers encourage them to undertake research and learn independently so the value of the learning resource centre for this is significant.
29. Teachers know that the questions they pose determine how much students think and discover things for themselves, rather than being told them. Many of them ask open questions and keep going until they have extracted the depth of reply or quality of response they want:
- challenging chemistry students until they articulate their ideas fluently;
 - making sure that students, identifying similarities between different styles of movies, use only the correct media studies' terms;
 - insisting on oral fluency and confidence in lessons conducted solely in French or German;
 - examining answers on whiteboards held by each student, so that none of them fail to keep up in mathematics;
 - urging students to share with others the strengths and weaknesses of their musical compositions;
 - simulating a hurricane so that geography students have to think on their feet and respond fast;
 - setting up mixed-ability groups for discussions in English so that higher ability students learn by explaining and less confident students are well supported;
 - insisting that students' interpretations of a play are dramatically justified in drama;
 - using visual aids to add clarity to theory lessons in physical education and expecting students to learn by listening, looking and explaining;
 - expecting students planning history essays to lead discussions in groups and only intervening to push their thinking further forward;
 - using students' research on multiculturalism as the foundation for discussions in art;
 - insisting that physics students reach decisions that they can justify with reference to data; and
 - demanding that business studies students not only manipulate data sensibly on spreadsheets but explain why, with full evaluative comments.
30. Teachers also know that learning is stimulated when lessons are fun. It was cheering to see the occasional interesting starter being used as effectively as in the main school, for example lucky dip quotations in Year 13 English. Understanding of how examination criteria work, and what students must do to achieve the highest grades, is another skill which teachers have mastered well. This is evident in the new AVCE ICT course which is progressing well. In many lessons, teachers were sensitive to nurturing students' literacy and numeracy skills, so it is not surprising that many of them do well in the Key Skills tests. Assessment procedures and analysis of data are as effective in the sixth form as in the main school (see paragraphs 26 and 27).

The curriculum

The curriculum is very good with some excellent features. Opportunities for enrichment, including extra-curricular activities, are excellent. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources are good overall, although parts of the accommodation, despite considerable developments, still need to be improved.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In all years, the subjects offered cater very well for pupils' and students' needs, aspirations and interests.
- The innovative whole and half days allocated to PSHE and citizenship are proving to be popular, stimulating and worthwhile. More citizenship needs to be addressed in the future.
- The excellent range and quality of extra-curricular activities help to create a strong school community.
- Since the last inspection the governors have made accommodation improvements a key priority and much has been achieved. The learning resource centre is excellent. Nevertheless, facilities are still very poor in textiles, food technology and for indoor physical education.
- The ICT and religious education taught in Years 10 and 11 do not meet statutory requirements and coverage of citizenship in Years 7 to 11 lacks coherence and depth. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.
- Teachers are very well qualified and the number of learning support assistants and administration staff supports teaching very well.

Commentary

31. The school reviews the curriculum regularly to make sure that it matches what pupils need for education beyond Year 11, and that it helps them to combine subjects in which they excel and/or enjoy. Thus, pupils can drop design and technology or a modern foreign language course for GCSE if they have particular abilities, for example in several performing arts subjects. Option subjects for GCSE include business studies, child development, ICT and drama – popular and worthwhile vocational courses. The senior management team interviews all lower attaining pupils about their choices for GCSE. The success of this approach and the guidance given are confirmed by the fact that these pupils make some of the best progress seen in Years 10 and 11. They are clearly following the right courses for them. What pupils do not get, unless they have chosen these subjects for GCSE or GNVQ, is their entitlement to religious education and ICT. This is a breach of statutory requirements, as is the lack of a daily act of collective worship.
32. The very good links with primary schools, including the developing bridging projects, where Broxbourne teachers work with Year 6 pupils, help teachers to build on the work pupils have studied before Year 7. After many years of tutors delivering the PSHE programme through fortnightly lessons, which the school felt did not work well, an innovative approach took off two years ago. On several whole and half days of the year, the timetable is abandoned and every year group has a stimulating and interesting day of PSHE and citizenship activities. The outside speakers' contributions are very worthwhile. So far the system has been very successful, but some citizenship topics need to be examined in greater depth in the future.
33. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and leads to them making at least very good progress. Phonics programmes are used effectively to help pupils with very low literacy skills to gain reading confidence. The very good support these pupils receive from their teachers, learning support assistants and the special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that they follow a broad and balanced range of subjects, which enables them to make the best possible progress. They are fully included in all of the school's activities. At present, pupils who struggle with their writing do not always use the good computer software programs enough, and the lack of tactile resources, such as plastic coins and items in a shop, holds back understanding for those pupils who really struggle in mathematics.

34. The school has a long tradition of participation in outdoor activities through the outdoor club that has been established for 30 years. The club operates from 'the hole' under the stage where there is an office and social area and immaculate equipment store. No pupil is barred from participating through lack of kit because the school has a great deal of equipment. The club is led by an enthusiastic and dedicated part-time teacher who devotes much time to organising and leading the numerous activities and expeditions. The opportunities provided are immense, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (see box above paragraph 12).
35. In addition, the excellent and wide ranging extra-curricular provision includes numerous music groups, dramatic productions, theatre and art gallery visits, fieldtrips, annual European and Canadian exchanges and a sporting fixture list that is second to none. For these the school has been awarded both Artsmark and Sportsmark Gold awards. So the curriculum promotes pupils' personal qualities as well as developing a very good range of knowledge, understanding and skills.
36. Both senior staff and a group of governors have worked hard and imaginatively to make significant improvements to the accommodation. In addition to considerable internal and external refurbishment, a superb new learning resource centre has been created by clever use of a gallery and roof space in the hall. The old swimming pool is now a new performing arts block with first-rate facilities for music, drama and dance. Four additional ICT rooms have been created, a significant improvement since the last inspection, but this has not yet provided adequate access to ICT for all subjects and the shape of two of the rooms creates some difficulties for teachers.
37. However, the school has finance in place and plans accepted for a new design and technology block. This will release rooms which will add significantly to ICT accommodation. This building is essential as textiles and food technology are taught in very poor, cramped facilities which need to be replaced urgently, and pupils in wheelchairs cannot access the textiles room. Overall, however, disability access is a strong feature of the school. Both gyms are too small: the lower school one particularly, and some changing rooms are also poor. Six out of nine science laboratories remain old fashioned and dingy.
38. A positive aspect of the school's accommodation is the number of subjects which are housed in suites of rooms with offices and storage facilities. This impacts directly on standards by encouraging collaborative approaches to teaching and use of resources. All departments have the necessary equipment, books and materials and most have interactive whiteboards, which encourages teachers to present work in an attractive and stimulating way. The school has a full complement of well-qualified teachers. Support staff, including a number of recently appointed learning support assistants, contribute effectively to the school's success. Support for the whole community in the learning resource centre is outstanding.

Sixth form

39. The sixth-form curriculum is very good. With over 20 AS/A-level and AVCE courses on offer, very few Year 11 pupils do not stay on into the sixth form. The school responds to their interests and adjusts the subjects offered. AVCE ICT, sociology, drama and media studies, for example, have all been introduced for this reason. The choice of business courses has also changed to those most suitable for the students' interests. The large number of enrichment activities are valued by the students, although those who do not study physical education for A-level receive no lessons. Neither do students, apart from those following the examination course, receive enough religious education to meet the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
40. The major improvements in accommodation in the school since the last inspection, referred to previously, have clearly benefited the sixth form. Equally, those areas which remain below standard impact on the sixth-formers' education. However, they do have their own building which is well equipped with teaching and social areas, but not toilets. Despite occasional

overcrowding as a result of the growth of sixth-form numbers, it is a reasonable environment for them. Departments teaching the sixth form are well resourced and the match of teachers to the subjects offered is excellent.

Care, guidance and support

The school ensures students' and pupils' care, welfare, health and safety very well. The school provides excellent support, advice and guidance for pupils and sixth-form students, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development. The school seeks to involve students and pupils very well in its work and development. Overall, care, guidance and support are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The impact on achievement of the excellent support, guidance and advice pupils and students receive is a significant strength.
- Pupils and students have a very secure, trusting relationship with at least one member of staff.
- Pupils are helped to settle in extremely well in Year 7.
- Pupils and students receive very good guidance about careers or further study.

Commentary

41. Sound child protection procedures are in place and lent further support through the regular, weekly visits of the highly respected Connexions personal adviser who has very good links with outside agencies. Health and safety monitoring procedures are good, being frequent and well organised. Risk assessment routines for school trips are particularly good and very well detailed. First aid is covered very well. In very wet weather the grass verges to the numerous paths lining the various buildings become slippery and can be hazardous.
42. Year 6 pupils in five neighbouring partner primary schools, who constitute the bulk of the upcoming Year 7, meet Broxbourne teachers through literacy, numeracy and French sessions held in the school and in the primaries. This not only means that as they enter the school their attainment level and aptitudes in those subjects are well-known but, also on a more generally supportive level, these pupils know staff and are familiar with the school. Many also say they very much look forward to coming to the school.

Excellent support, advice and guidance based on excellent relationships and meticulous monitoring
--

This permeates the entire organisation and contributes strongly to the very good achievement. It is based on two components: (a) the excellent relationships and (b) the meticulous monitoring of pupils' and students' personal development, in addition to academic assessment of their academic performance.

- (a) Pupils and students are confident that there is an adult they can trust; teaching staff, form tutors and heads of year are all cited as being approachable and ready to listen to their concerns or problems. Staff too comment very favourably on how well they themselves are supported. Harmonious relationships at all levels create a climate of trust.
- (b) The school's rigorous analysis of its performance helps teachers to set very precise, challenging targets based on prior attainment, for themselves and their pupils and students. The latter targets are further guided by detailed tracking of pupils' and students' personal development through half-a-dozen categories including, for example, effort or the quality of homework. These regularly updated records are shared with pupils and students, and their parents during the year. All staff can access them. In the atmosphere of trust and support, students and pupils know their targets are to help them and they try hard to achieve them.

43. Pupils are extremely positive about the school and their views are clearly heard and responded to very well. They struggle to think of anything they would like to see improved and 100 per cent of them agreed with the pre-inspection questionnaire words: 'This is a good school to be at'. Again, the very good relationships between staff and pupils contribute to this. It is central to the ethos of the school that pupils' views are valued. This characteristic, in conjunction with the broad range of responsibilities offered to them, is one of the main forces behind the pupils' strong personal development and maturity and is perhaps the key to the calm atmosphere of

the school. The school council is well established, meets frequently and pupils feel free to discuss any issue they please; however, the main office roles are not currently devolved to the pupils themselves.

44. The very high quality of careers advice or opportunities for further study benefits strongly from the excellent support, advice and guidance that permeates the school (see box above). In addition, the regular weekly visits of the highly trained and well-respected Connexions adviser ensure that advice is very well targeted to individual needs. There is also a good programme, starting in Year 7 with a work shadowing day, that helps pupils and parents get to grips with pupils' sometimes vague sense of careers or, within a general area such as fashion, to identify and focus on a particular aspect.
45. There are very good links with external agencies for educational psychology, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy support. Excellent learning support assistants work effectively with physiotherapy programmes to ensure that non-ambulant pupils are as free from pain as possible. The pastoral team has a common-sense approach to pupils who may manifest signs of clinical depression and ensures that early interventionist strategies are switched in. A teacher has been trained as a counsellor and the school arranges anger management support for those pupils who need it. In the school's special educational needs records (though not in terms of the support they receive) some pupils are incorrectly categorised. Steps should be taken to ensure that the descriptions of these pupils' needs are recorded accurately.

Sixth form

46. All that has been said about the main school applies to the sixth form too. Students receive excellent support, guidance and advice. Most of the sixth-formers have come right through the school from Year 7 and feel very much at home. This reflects how very much a part of the school the sixth form is. Students with particular needs are very well supported through additional help – two students with long-term illnesses study from home but staff visit them and give them much help and support. All students acknowledge that they enjoy being in the sixth form. They find the teaching challenging and demanding and are confident that the staff are experts in their subjects and always ready to help them when necessary. With so many students involved in interests such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, it is not surprising that they are positive about enrichment activities.
47. Careers advice and university guidance, including for Oxbridge entrants, are again very well targeted to the needs of the individual. Students' views and investigations into the quality and component parts of courses very much lead their selection of universities. Their choices are carefully questioned and then supported by staff. For example, a higher ability student will not be applying to Oxbridge because the details of the course on offer are not as good as can be found elsewhere. Students find the careers guidance they receive very helpful.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents is very good. The school's partnership with the community is very good. The school's links with other schools and colleges are good and developing well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have extremely positive views about all aspects of school life.
- Parents receive very good information, they are fully involved in their children's learning and have raised very substantial amounts of money for the school.
- Parents' views are sought regularly and, if parents should have concerns or complaints, the procedures they can follow are very good.
- Arrangements for pupils to transfer from primary school are very good.

Commentary (for the main school and sixth form)

48. Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress through the carefully worked out programme of reporting to parents for the different years. This reflects the school's own very good tracking of personal development as well as academic monitoring. Intermediate reporting sheets giving pupils' and students' grades are released throughout the year. Annual reports are concise and sharp with very good prompts on what pupils and students need to do to improve. Curriculum information is explained well and parents' workshops are held – a particularly useful one in ICT, funded by the school's business and enterprise specialism.
49. The parents' extremely positive descriptions of the school, expressed in the pre-inspection questionnaires and meeting ('It's light years ahead of other schools I know') are well illustrated by their views on how well the school deals with their concerns and complaints. The school's approachability and procedures for dealing with them are very good. They stem principally from the headteacher's conscientious determination to give them priority. As a result, most parents have few concerns. Parents raise very large sums of money, for example £50,000 to equip the school with computers and interactive whiteboards. The very active Friends of The Broxbourne School regularly hold events which provide a steady supply of funds for the school. The very good provision of school trips and visits also require regular financial input from parents; a school fund ensures that all students who are entitled will go on these trips.
50. Parents are consulted regularly and their views are valued and acted on very well. For example their views were sought on all the significant developments in recent years, such as the bid for specialist status or curriculum changes. The school takes very good care to involve parents regularly in preparing their children for transfer, both within the school to the sixth form, and from the sixth form to universities and colleges. Year 7 pupils have a day when they must work-shadow their parents, encouraging early thoughts on career and further education opportunities – another example of the very good links between home and school.
51. The school has very good links with the community, involving many pupils and students. The large numbers involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme mean many help in the local community, over and above the usual links schools have. The Millennium Volunteers group means that over 100 students help within the community (as well as within school), encouraging them to become mature and responsible adults. The longstanding links with a large bank (see paragraph 196) help students by, not only giving them work-related opportunities, but also by providing useful seminars on personal financial management. Another large local business offers the school regular work-related opportunities. The school is linked to the local community health trust.
52. Links with other schools and colleges are good. The strongest feature is the numerous sports fixtures played with an exceptionally large number of schools, including independent ones, both in the UK and abroad. The new bridging project with five neighbouring partner primary schools is very promising because it has already had a major impact on how new pupils settle, by making the transition much more seamless. It has helped teachers to be more effective straight away at targeting work to match pupils' abilities. The sharing of teachers' knowledge and expertise, particularly within literacy, has already been of significant benefit to several primary schools.
53. There are very good arrangements to involve parents in annual reviews of pupils with statements of special educational needs. Links with primary schools over the transfer of pupils with learning difficulties from Year 6 to Year 7 are effective. There are good links with colleges for pupils who wish to follow courses there rather than in the sixth form. Before the inspection, a parents wrote to observe how well her child with special educational needs had flourished at the school: 'His roots were created at home but Broxbourne has given him wings'.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are very good. Leadership is very good. Management is very good. The work of the governing body is very good. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership by the headteacher who is extremely well supported by a most effective senior management team and business manager.
- Heads of departments and pastoral heads give very good leadership and the management of the school is most efficient and effective.
- A diligent, lively and well-informed governing body.
- The school has very robust financial management which helps it to achieve its educational priorities very well.
- Very good leadership and management of the growing sixth form.

Commentary

54. The headteacher is experienced and wise. He attributes the school's success to all the teachers and staff, seeing his role as the key member of a large, co-operative team. He is rightly proud of his success in appointing good teachers who will, and do, flourish at the school. Since his arrival just before the last inspection, he has generated an atmosphere of accountability and attention to detail, backed up with support and trust. The senior management team functions with the same high ideals and, along with a strong layer of middle managers and effective and efficient support and administrative staff, the school functions very well. The fact that well over 20 teachers attend a working party on improving teaching and learning, is testimony to the school's drive to keep improving standards.
55. The leadership and management of pupils with learning difficulties are very good because of the expertise and skills of the special educational needs co-ordinator. Management systems are very good, particularly the procedures for assessing pupils' needs and for monitoring their progress. An administration issue has been described in paragraph 45. The governors' procedures for informing parents that their child has special educational needs are robust. The governors' annual report to parents is not sufficiently sharp in evaluating the impact of the special educational needs policy for pupils who receive this support.
56. Performance management is well developed and teachers' objectives have links with specific targets for achievement, which in turn are linked to the slim and practical school improvement plan. A very effective induction process for new, and newly qualified, teachers is also in place. The school places a high priority on the continuing professional development of staff and the opportunities provided are generous. This is one of several reasons why teachers feel valued and appreciated. This impacts directly and positively on the quality of teaching, and hence standards.
57. Decisions about initiatives and curriculum developments, for example the delivery of PSHE/citizenship, reflect the chair of governors' observation that: 'the school goes for quality not quantity'. The lack of enough ICT and religious education in Years 10 and 11 to meet statutory requirements for all pupils has been acknowledged since the last inspection. Both subjects are high on the list for improvement now that ICT facilities are so much better and a strong religious education department is in place.
58. The governing body is alert, hardworking and thoughtful. Members bring an valuable range of expertise to their deliberations. The outstanding practical contributions by an architect are most noteworthy. A particularly striking feature is that after the last inspection, four groups were established to monitor how well the key issues were being tackled. These groups are still going strong as they have incorporated developments and further improvements as they have evolved. They will continue, as they have been so effective. The lack of a daily act of collective worship has been debated fully and, as with the innovative approach to PSHE and citizenship, the governing body is resolved to go for steady, well-considered growth.

59. The governors are rightly proud of the school and could not be more supportive. They have an excellent relationship with the headteacher and senior managers. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good overall, although work remains to be done, in addition to sorting the poor areas of accommodation, on the two statutory issues described above.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,754,895	Balance from previous year	141,832
Total expenditure	4,520,065	Balance carried forward to the next	234,830
Expenditure per pupil	3,453		

60. The school is very conscientious in trying to ensure that educational priorities are directly linked to financial constraints. This is vividly illustrated by useful evaluative definitions of hard-to-quantify elements of education. For example, in determining the impact of large class sizes in Years 7 to 9, definitions of effective teacher-pupil ratios were generated with reference to classroom support, academic standards and pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The results led to more effective targeting of human resources. This perceptive approach is further supported by three-year projected staffing costs for the educational services planned. So, at a glance, the school can determine the value of its current provision on a broad front, highlight which elements are relatively more, or less, expensive and easily see the inevitable crossover subsidies between certain elements.
61. One of the definitive consequences of the very good financial practices has been that the school anticipated the workload directives from the DfES through its own very good best-value criteria. So it has been able to move very quickly on their implementation. Heads of departments and teaching staff are already free from everyday clerical duties and invigilation, and concentrate more on planning and organising their priorities. The administrative staff, managed most efficiently by the business manager, are highly organised and very efficient at carrying out these essential tasks at great speed.
62. Expenditure per pupil is slightly higher than the median but this figure includes certain sums that have all been spent this year when their technical allocation was over a three-year period. This was outside the school's control. Funds allocated to support pupils with special educational needs are spent correctly, contributing effectively to the very good progress made by these pupils. The school adds to the external funds from its main budget. Expenditure is very close to the average. Given, therefore, the high standard of education that the school achieves, the school provides very good value for money.

Sixth form

63. The head of sixth form is a key member of the senior management team, reflecting that the school expects sixth-formers to be full members of the whole community, which they are. He leads a strong team of form tutors extremely well and oversees management of students' pastoral and academic development just as efficiently. He has successfully increased tutors' involvement in overseeing students' combined academic and personal progress. The governors and headteacher are pleased with the growing numbers and success of the sixth form and support it enthusiastically. It is very good that the head of the sixth form meets all students regularly, delivering the general studies course, but it is also clear that he knows their individual situations very well. Every student who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that the school is well run and this certainly reflects the high quality leadership of the sixth form.

64. The sixth form is financially managed in the same very efficient way as in the main school. The results of this coherent and perceptive approach to costing educational priorities, with much of the hidden and shared costs revealed, can be seen in recent sixth-form developments: more students and higher standards, in tandem with an expanded choice of subjects. Although the school may be criticised for not offering more vocational courses, it is clear that the quality of these courses in nearby colleges has been gauged realistically. The school has determined that the cost of providing these courses at a similar standard would not be financially efficient, that is, of best value to its students. The governors provide the same high quality of leadership and direction for the sixth form as for the main school. The sixth form provides very good value for money.

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 **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils speak articulately and listen with concentration and attention – at levels well above that seen nationally.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. Their very good, detailed planning ensures that lessons generate interest and enthusiasm.
- Pupils respond very well to the teachers' high expectations of behaviour and the challenging tasks they set.
- Very good leadership and management create a strong team spirit in the department which supports pupils' learning very well.
- A small minority of pupils, especially in Years 7 to 9, does not punctuate and spell words accurately. The department is addressing this.

Commentary

65. Pupils' standards on entry to the school are average but the end of Year 9 test results are well above average. GCSE English and English literature results have been well above average for several years and, in 2003, one in five pupils attained A*/A grades. Results in English literature, taken by the significant majority of pupils, were particularly striking. Pupils clearly enjoy this subject. Those with special educational needs make very good progress because their needs are carefully identified and teachers and learning support assistants provide the right level of guidance and encouragement. All pupils make significant progress between Year 7 and the end of Year 11.
66. Boys and girls contribute confidently to discussions. It is particularly noteworthy that boys readily share their ideas on creative work, as well as examples of their own writing. Pupils read with interest and fluency, reflecting awareness of both the tone and the intention of authors they study. Their writing is less well developed, although the highest attaining pupils write with energy and technical accuracy. Pupils can write for different audiences and use English in different ways, for example creatively and discursively. Most use paragraphs accurately and have a clear understanding of sentence structure. However, a small minority, especially in Years 7 to 9, frequently uses commas where full stops should be used, and regularly spells relatively straightforward words inaccurately. The department is doing further work using the Key Stage 3 Strategy, to refine and develop different ways to improve these pupils' writing.
67. The best lessons are planned in detail and well paced, successfully stimulating pupils' interest and enthusiasm. They often start in unusual ways, for example using nursery rhymes in Year 7 to illustrate words related to time, or showing visually stimulating photographs in Year 11 to nurture creative writing. After a starter picture from *Psycho*, pupils had to write a story, with

tension, with each sentence having one less word, until there was one. To elicit detailed knowledge from pupils, teachers often ask well-chosen, quick-fire questions which generate a sense of dynamism in lessons. Very often pupils feel successful within the first ten minutes of a lesson, so they move onto the rest of the lesson positively. They regularly use whiteboards to try out their ideas, knowing that they can alter and refine their thoughts as they go along. This is very successful.

68. Teachers select an interesting variety of resources and tasks, which maintain pupils' commitment and motivation: reading from *Jaws* as an example of tension in writing, asking who said which quotation, to check on understanding of *Macbeth*, or posing interesting questions such as 'What might the air taste of?'. At the end of lessons, the teachers' well-rounded conclusions both strengthen what has been learned and prepare pupils for work to come. In the less successful lessons the pace is not quite right – either too frantic, which encourages some pupils to feel overwhelmed, or too slow, which prevents all pupils achieving all they might. Rushed summaries at the end lessen the impact of what has gone before. Occasionally, more passive pupils are not brought into discussions.
69. The teachers' strong knowledge of literature and how to develop literacy skills, combined with their obvious enjoyment of their subject, invariably mean that relationships are excellent. ICT is used regularly and specific programs have been bought to help pupils with special educational needs and to develop all pupils' high level language. Teachers mark work regularly and sympathetically so that pupils are made aware of their current levels and of ways they can improve their work. Although the bridging project with primary schools is still in its early stages, it is clear that it will have a positive impact on the standards pupils achieve. Eye-catching displays in classrooms and around the English area stimulate an atmosphere in which very good learning takes place. Pupils find it a pleasure to be in such vibrant and entertaining classrooms.
70. The department has a strong commitment to shared responsibility, with an effective team approach to developing the highest quality learning. A good programme of regularly sharing ideas, mutual support and training has created an enthusiastic and energetic team. The head of department is a very good role model – highly supportive of his colleagues and encouraging them to undertake leadership and management responsibilities. All pupils now make much better progress than at the time of the last inspection, they use ICT much more and both teaching and learning have improved significantly.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

71. The overall standard of literacy in other subjects is above average in all years. The school is well up to date with implementing the Key Stage 3 National Strategy and the school improvement plan highlights the importance placed on this. Speaking and listening are the pupils' strongest language skills. These are particularly well developed in religious education and modern foreign languages; on occasions, other subjects could use oral activities more often to help pupils amass and refine their ideas. Pupils read well and almost all subjects encourage them to practise. All departments encourage pupils to use subject-specific vocabulary, and display key words in classrooms. Writing frames which help pupils to write longer pieces are used but there is limited evidence of the language and literacy side of written work being corrected regularly. In form times, pupils often work on literacy booklets, with boys showing a particular interest in word searches.
72. The learning resource centre is a high quality facility which is managed extremely well. It has been developed and extended in recent years and now provides all members of the school community with excellent support. Its four distinct areas mean that at any given time up to three separate classes can be working on different activities, whilst a number of pupils still have space to undertake independent, silent study. A very wide selection of interesting and useful books and magazines is available and a very good fiction library encourages enjoyment of reading for pleasure. Excellent relationships have been built up between the librarians and

teachers so there is close co-operation on the selection and purchase of new books. The experienced librarian monitors carefully which books are used, so that they can withdraw unused ones and buy extra copies of popular ones. Thus, the books are constantly as topical and useful as possible. Teachers regularly bring classes into the area during lessons, and often send individual pupils to research topics. The area is used to capacity at break-times and lunchtimes, and regularly before school starts. Pupils enjoy working here and benefit significantly from all it offers.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is excellent</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and excellent management of the subject.
- Pupils' very good achievement and outstanding GCSE results. Many speak with great fluency and confidence.
- The very good, often excellent teaching which is lively and imaginative.

Commentary

73. GCSE results have improved considerably since the last inspection and reached an exceptionally high standard in 2003. All pupils study French in Years 7 to 9 and attain well above average standards because of the high quality teaching. They gain a solid knowledge of basic grammar and write very well. Higher attaining pupils produce fluent, accurate pieces of writing. Pupils with special educational needs concentrate on the spoken language in Year 7, but also develop sound writing by Year 9. Most pupils speak French confidently and have good accents. The use of challenging recorded materials helps them to listen very well. In Years 10 and 11 most pupils continue to study French and attain well above average standards overall. However, a minority of Year 11 pupils do not speak French as well as they write the language.
74. Teaching and learning were excellent in over a third of lessons seen. Excellent relationships, an element of competition and a high level of challenge and pace motivate pupils to work hard. All lessons are very well planned and sequenced, building pupils' knowledge and skills step by step. Teachers use a variety of interesting and fun activities to practise and learn new material. They ensure that all pupils participate fully and enjoy success in lessons. Gentle but firm insistence on accuracy helps pupils to achieve high standards. Teachers are skilled linguists with excellent subject knowledge. French is usually the main means of communication in the classroom although, occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to use the language and develop pupils' listening skills further.
75. Pupils work in pairs and groups routinely, which enables them to practise speaking and to co-operate with partners. ICT is used regularly and effectively to aid learning (see box below paragraph 101). The French course also contributes very well to pupils' broader literacy, to their personal development and their knowledge of citizenship. Pupils generally behave very well and they are very keen to learn. However, some pupils in one Year 11 group are at times unco-operative, which interferes with learning.

76. Regular monitoring of classroom work helps colleagues to share good practice. Results are analysed in detail, and action is taken to improve provision and raise achievement. The head of department has good vision for the development of modern foreign languages. A wide range of study trips and exchanges enriches the curriculum, and the department runs a splendid introductory course for Year 6 pupils as part of the bridging project. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The modern foreign languages department has a very strong team of committed teachers and is in a position to improve still further.

German

77. GCSE results have compared unfavourably with those in French in recent years. However, there was a dramatic improvement in 2003, when results were very high. Practically all pupils learn German as a second modern foreign language in Year 9, and make very rapid progress. Those who continue the language in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well and attain well above average standards. Two lessons were seen during the inspection; teaching and learning were excellent in both. Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 are well above national averages.
- Pupils' achievement is very good, notably between Years 7 and 9.
- The use of ICT in mathematics is significantly underdeveloped.
- Steps are being taken to increase the small number of A* grades at GCSE.
- The bridging project provides valuable numeracy support to Year 6 pupils in five local primary schools.

Commentary

78. In each of the last three years, well over four out of five pupils attained at least the expected level in national tests at the end of Year 9 – well above average. When compared to the pupils' standards on entry into the school, this represents very good achievement by boys and girls, with boys performing better. There is a steady but small increase in those attaining Levels 7 and 8. GCSE results have also been well above average, although only one pupil in each of the last three years has attained an A* grade, so the average point score per pupil is lower in mathematics than in other subjects. In 2003, one Year 10 class entered GCSE statistics – all pupils passed and 12 attained A*/A grades. Standards seen during the inspection were above average; plans show that revision for Year 9 tests and GCSEs is very effective at raising standards to a higher level.

79. Recent, effective initiatives seek to improve the number of GCSE A* grades. These include an increase in the number of Year 10 teaching sets to create smaller class sizes, the chance for higher attaining pupils to raise their overall standards by taking GCSE statistics, and provision of masterclasses for some girls in Years 10 and 11, to overcome the gender imbalance in results. Pupils benefit from a department which is fully staffed by specialist mathematicians. Much teaching and learning is of a high standard, with teachers conveying their enthusiasm for

the subject to the pupils. Almost half the lessons seen were at least very good, only one was unsatisfactory.

80. Teachers' planning is excellent, as are starter activities – often closely connected to the main theme of the lesson – many of which actively stimulate pupils' interest and enjoyment. Clear and knowledgeable teaching promotes learning, and the frequent questions teachers ask are especially effective where pupils have to explain their reasoning. Teachers use resources, including digital projector and whiteboards, well. A few lessons are over teacher-directed leaving too little time for written work. In others, though there is setting by ability, teachers are not always fully aware of the full range of ability. Pace and momentum are often very good, occasionally too much so for some pupils whose learning requires more reinforcement.
81. Coursework investigations show significant improvement by Year 11. Higher attaining pupils reach high levels, although few currently succeed at the highest grades. Middle and lower attaining pupils, and pupils with special educational needs, make particularly striking progress. Teacher-pupil relationships are very good. Almost all pupils study very diligently, they are attentive and take pride in their work. When solving problems they do not always show all stages of calculation clearly. Too many just write down answers or show minimal working out. Much work is self-assessed and, whilst checked by teachers, little helpful comment is written down, so pupils are not clear how their work may be improved. The regular assessment tests are fully marked and graded.
82. Bridging projects with local primary schools are a major innovation and are proving effective and enjoyable by the Year 6 pupils involved. In addition to those mentioned in paragraph 79, masterclasses are now in operation for Year 9 boys and girls who seek to gain Level 8. The learning resource centre is well stocked with texts, revision guides and general books on mathematics. Computer software is available for support work at various levels but pupils do not use computers nearly enough and ICT in lessons is very underdeveloped and not monitored properly. The large ICT facility is underused, an ineffective use of valuable resources. Assessment data is extensively analysed and pupils receive individual target levels or grades, which is excellent. Some of the pupils' targets are weak because they are too vague, for example 'I must work harder', or 'Revise more' – these do not give pupils specific detail about what they must do to improve. The department suite of rooms contains good displays, though more by pupils would be helpful.
83. There is a great deal for the department to celebrate, with significant improvement in standards since the last inspection. Pupils are motivated, they feel supported and know they are receiving a good education. Achievement is very good and, with appropriate drive to attain the highest levels, even better results should be forthcoming.

Mathematics across the curriculum

84. Considerable emphasis on developing numerical skills occurs within the mathematics curriculum. All lower attaining pupils are taught by staff with experience in special educational needs. Pupils gain confidence and accuracy in number bonds and basic graphs, developing to simple fractions and probability.
85. All pupils are encouraged to calculate without use of a calculator, except when sensibly required, so their mental recall is strengthened. They proceed into simple algebra, areas of shapes and Pythagoras, the vast majority being very competent at these by the end of Year 9. Higher attaining pupils deal well with statistical concepts, trigonometry and more complex computation.
86. This solid grounding significantly influences other areas of the curriculum. In no subject is progress held back by weakness in mathematics – allowing for ability. Graphical work is well done. Quality work was evident in design and technology. In religious education, a survey of views on life after death yielded most effective results and display. In modern foreign

languages, very good computation using the target language was seen, involving clocks and digital watches, games and the totalling of items. Strengths in numeracy were evident in geography, particularly associated with analysis of fieldwork data such as stream flow, and interpretation of statistics using rank correlation. Manipulation of formulae was efficiently done in electronics, and good use of graphs, surveys and star diagrams was seen in food technology.

87. All departments have a copy of the numeracy policy, and cross-curricular links are being further developed. The policy lacks clear exemplars of key mathematical aspects, such as the various acceptable methods for multiplication or division, and recommended ways for drawing graphs and displaying statistical data.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good. It includes excellent features which the department could share in the future to strengthen the quality of learning.
- Pupils quickly develop very good practical skills. A greater focus from Year 7, on encouraging their investigative skills during class experiments, is needed.
- There is a good team approach to raising standards. Some teachers do not creatively involve pupils in imaginative starter and end-of-lesson activities.
- Teachers mark work consistently and regularly; pupils do not always act upon written comments, which thwarts their progress.

Commentary

88. Year 9 test results in 2003 were above average overall, although pupils had not achieved as much as expected based on their test results at the end of primary school. The percentage of pupils reaching the expected level was well above average and nearly half the pupils reached the higher levels (above average). However, this percentage was lower than in English and mathematics and not quite as high as predicted. The percentage of GCSE grades A*-C was well above average, showing that pupils had achieved very well.
89. The progress pupils make is strongly linked to the quality of teaching. A teacher's constant stream of challenging open-ended questions led to thoughtful suggestions from Year 7 pupils about whether or not the temperature of boiling water increased the longer it boiled, and what might be happening to its particles as it bubbled. They made excellent progress because the teacher cleverly guided them towards a deeper understanding of particle theory. Building on this information, Year 9 higher attainers work out for themselves why air surrounding hot wires becomes less dense. Progress slows down as pupils answer questions from textbooks rather than widening their technical vocabulary and explaining conclusions. On occasions, teachers structure and guide experiments too much so that pupils do not learn about experimental method.
90. Watching an interesting demonstration, higher attainers in Year 10 learnt well about the action of the earth wire during a fault and its effect upon the fuse in a kettle. Lower attainers in Year 11 know that some chemical reactions are reversible because the idea was illustrated for them in several ways. All pupils know how to plan investigations. The very highest attainers deftly

interpret results and refer to fundamental ideas about science when drawing conclusions. Many, however, need to increase the sophistication of their observations and raise the standard of their evaluations. Teachers do not focus on these skills early enough.

91. The quality of teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory. A strength is the teachers' subject expertise. It was used successfully to lead a Year 10 class through a series of well-planned steps to learn about complex atomic structures. The high quality technician support means that pupils develop very good practical skills. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress because their teachers know their needs well and learning support assistant have expert skills and prepare well for lessons. The best teaching is imaginative, making work demanding yet tantalising. In such lessons, the teachers not only know what pupils need to learn, but also understand how to guide pupils to learn in a meaningful way. For example, Year 7 pupils had to apply their knowledge of changes in materials to how liquids can be separated by distillation. In contrast, learning is occasionally diminished by dull planning, a slow pace and lack of imaginative starter activities and endings to lessons that creatively involve pupils. When teachers make comments on pupils' written work they do not routinely check that pupils have acted upon them, so good learning opportunities are lost.
92. There is a noticeable drive for improvement through good teamwork, resulting in new courses, schemes and testing procedures. The department is analysing its performance thoroughly, and using this to identify strengths, weaknesses and those pupils who need extra help. Three laboratories have been refurbished but, although materials and equipment are well maintained, the preparation areas are very congested. Access to computers has improved but equipment for data logging is unsatisfactory as it is unreliable.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved achievement since the last inspection because the accommodation and resources have increased.
- Teaching, which is now good, is having a substantial impact on raising standards.
- Very good leadership, with coherent plans for further development in discrete lessons and in other subjects and using computers to support the work of the school.
- In Years 10 and 11, pupils taking GNVQ have wide-ranging experiences using computers, but others do not receive their National Curriculum entitlement.
- Because two planned rooms have not yet been built, some subjects do not use computers enough and some rooms are inadequately ventilated and poorly designed.

Commentary

93. Pupils were entered for the GNVQ for the first time in 2003. Results were well below average because a third of candidates, mainly boys, failed to gain a grade. However, results in the coursework and examinations for the current groups are much better and a significant number of pupils are working at the higher merit and distinction levels.
94. When pupils enter the school their attainment is above average overall. This is because many of the partner primary schools develop a wide range of experience and many pupils have

computers at home that they use regularly. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are using computers significantly more in several subjects than during the last inspection. This year, the number of discrete ICT lessons has also increased so that National Curriculum requirements are now met. However, pupils have limited experience of using a computer to control and make things happen. Both boys and girls achieve similarly and use computers in and out of school equally. Lower attaining pupils progress well because they find the freedom of using keyboards and printing their work out encourages them to succeed. All pupils can follow instructions well, complete work quickly and effectively and then use what they have learnt in new situations.

95. In Years 10 and 11 the large number of pupils following the GNVQ course are doing well and covering the National Curriculum. However, pupils who do not follow the course only get a very limited experience of using ICT. They fail to get their entitlement as laid out in the National Curriculum and so have only limited understanding of how and when to use ICT, and its advantages and disadvantages for life outside school.
96. Only occasionally, when the teacher has misjudged pupils' prior attainment, are there weaknesses in teaching. Teaching is sometimes very good because the reorganisation of the department has brought together skilful and knowledgeable teachers who are well organised to use the good resources. They are very well supported by the technical staff and all the teaching staff comment on how good it is to go to a computer room where all the machines work all the time. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9 made very good progress when the teacher broke down the production of spreadsheets into a series of related stages, giving them confidence and helping them to overcome their fear of numeracy.
97. Pupils get going quickly, work co-operatively and ensure that they, and their neighbours, make good progress. Teachers set interesting tasks, work at a crisp pace and pupils respond to their enthusiasm. There is a good range of programs and as pupils move through the school they get the opportunity to choose which one to use. They store their work in their own area of the computer system and can refer to it if they want to remind themselves of how to do something. Pupils certainly value being able to print in colour and present information to a whole class. Learning is extended outside lessons by pupils having lots of opportunities to attend clubs or simply drop in to use a computer. This is a commendable feature, when pupils join a class to use the equipment and return to their own when the work is completed.
98. The department was reorganised this September and substantial change has been made, leading to significant improvements, with more planned. Leadership is very good, and there are coherent plans for further development for ICT as a subject, within other subjects, and in using computers to support the work of the school. Weaknesses remain, however, as not all the planned building work has happened, so there is a shortage of quality accommodation. Some of the necessary alterations have had to be done to buildings that are not ideal, leading to problems of heating and ventilation, as well as pupils not being able to see the whiteboard easily.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

99. There are systematic development plans which are being implemented to ensure all pupils use computers in all subjects, as required by the National Curriculum. Good progress is being made. All staff have received focused training both from within the school and from national training initiatives. There are important developments in further utilising the administrative computer system to support teaching and learning.
100. All teachers have access to significantly more computers than at the last inspection, and these are maintained to a very high standard. There are shortages of specialist equipment however, such as in science where data logging is not used enough. The music department has just taken delivery of new equipment which should allow requirements to be fully met.

101. ICT lessons prepare pupils well to use their knowledge and understanding of computer programs effectively in all their other lessons. Progress is variable, however, and some subjects do not use the existing equipment enough, like mathematics and history. Some use it intermittently and others, like geography and art and design, are using it well. Modern foreign languages are using it very well:

Developing ICT skills at the same time as learning French

Year 8 pupils had been studying the parts of the body. Their next lesson was in a specialist ICT room that they use regularly to extend and consolidate their learning. There were a wide range of tasks for them to complete and they moved through them at a very fast pace. Pupils had to: match pictures with the appropriate name; find matching pairs of words; hangman; order the words of a sentence about a monster; and to finish, adapt a description of a monster to meet their own criteria. Not only was the foreign language used throughout for the subject content, but for using computers as well. The teacher identified a pupil to translate what she had said into English to ensure everyone understood. At the end of the lesson, not only had the pupils extended their subject knowledge, but they had developed technical language as well.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching based on the teachers' very good specialist subject knowledge and their collaborative skills for planning and sharing good practice.
- Very good interactive relationships; pupils enjoy this subject.
- A dynamic and relevant fieldwork programme in all years contributes much to pupils' very good learning.
- A lack of consistency about matching work for higher ability pupils and those with special educational needs.

Commentary

102. Standards at the end of Year 9 have been well above average since the last inspection, following a review and amendment of the schemes of work. Pupils gain secure knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. GCSE results are equally strong – over 30 per cent of pupils attained A*/A grades in 2003. Girls perform better than boys at these high grades, as seen nationally.

103. Teaching is a major strength. The experienced and specialist teachers create a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for learning. Many lessons contain very good practice, especially in Years 10 and 11. The teachers' knowledge is excellent, passed on in a clear and lucid style, with fine examples of role-play lessons in all years. Two lessons on China's One Child Policy in Year 8 were introduced with powerful emotive themes and a Year 11 lesson addressed demographic issues well after a most focused and interesting start. Successful collaborative work is a successful feature of many lessons.

104. Despite an excellent policy, not all teachers plan work specifically to address both ends of the ability spectrum. In the best lessons all pupils are considered, whatever their ability, with

special educational needs pupils ably supported by both teacher and learning assistants and gifted pupils given specific work plus challenging questions. In a few lessons, higher ability pupils could do more, and work is too difficult for those with special educational needs. Overall though, these pupils make good progress. Literacy, numeracy and citizenship are integrated well in many lessons, and pupils use ICT regularly, especially for GCSE coursework.

105. Pupils understand and appreciate the principal factors of location, and grasp the human and physical concepts of their studies, often applying newly acquired knowledge to specific case studies, for example considering weather patterns or discussing fair trade. Fieldwork is a key feature of the department's work, with pupils' geographical understanding enhanced with local studies and visits to other areas of the UK such as Norfolk and Wales. Another strength is how well the department liaises with other subjects, so that pupils can see the relevance of geography to, for example, history or religious education. Teachers also highlight the relevance of this subject to pupils' future lives very well.
106. Important features of the department include its well-structured policy and planning documents, the constructive use of assessment and marking, together with a strong commitment to excellence. Pupils' work and other resources are displayed effectively throughout the suite of rooms. A new head of department took over just before the inspection. It was clear that she will be well supported by, and has already appreciated, the strong and experienced team of teachers and their collaborative style of working.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is lively, challenging and characterised by excellent narrative and use of resources.
- Pupils' writing is sophisticated, accurate and well structured.
- The teachers' planning is excellent and their assessment is clear and constructive.
- The leadership and management of the department provides vision, support and excellent organisation.
- Occasionally, opportunities for pupils to contribute in extended discussions and work together are missed.

Commentary

107. Pupils make very good progress because teachers plan lessons carefully and pace them well. From their entry to the school, where overall standards are only slightly above average, to the end of Years 9 and 11, pupils achieve very well. GCSE results in 2003 showed that value-added in this subject is strong, with nearly half the pupils attaining A*/A grades; a result which is at least twice that seen nationally. Boys do very well compared with national figures and pupils with special educational needs also achieve better than expected. Pupils write at length, fluently, understand historical cause and effect, recognise bias and enjoy understanding the past. In Years 10 and 11, pupils work meticulously, drawing on rich historical sources to complete varied and interesting tasks.
108. A major factor in the department's success is the high quality of teaching and learning. This is characterised by teachers' outstanding narrative skills which bring history alive as they act out

roles. For example, a mediaeval preacher conjuring up visions of hell for his congregation helped pupils to understand how the church maintained law and order. In another lesson, the teacher became a drunken munitions worker damaging the war effort in 1915. An impressive range of source materials and activities stimulate imaginative writing, carefully-structured essays and thoughtful verbal responses from pupils. For example, 1960s music introduced a lesson on protests of that era, and pupils studying the eighteenth century slave trade recalled their own worst journey.

109. A strong feature of pupils' work is extended and well-structured writing. Year 9 pupils' diaries of a First World War soldier were both historically accurate and sensitively written. Other Year 9 pupils wrote essays on the causes of the First World War which were clearly of a good GCSE standard. Year 7 pupils also learn to write and plan essays well: one concluded a well-researched piece on William I's character with 'William just liked killing people'. Pupils learn well because they enjoy the subject, are challenged and respect each other and their teachers. They are very clear about their own level in the subject and what they have to do to improve. Teachers focus their marking sharply on the individual needs of the pupil. The high quality of the learning would be improved, however, if the opportunities for pupils to debate together at length and make extended oral presentations matched those that teachers provide to develop written skills.
110. The head of department's leadership and management of this strong team make a major contribution to the quality of learning. A collaborative ethos, clear vision and commitment to improvement characterise the department, as do effective day-to-day planning, pooling of resources and sharing of best practice. The coherent annual improvement plan commits the department to greater use of ICT when two new computer suites are completed. Pupils' enthusiasm for history is enhanced by opportunities to visit Berlin, Prague, First World War battlefields and various local sites, including Bletchley Park. The percentage of high GCSE grades has gone up and teaching has improved significantly.

Religious education

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

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching delivered enthusiastically, at a cracking pace, based on excellent subject knowledge, leads to very good achievement.
- Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not taught enough religious education to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good and result in very good learning.
- The subject makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual development and also to raising their awareness of cultural diversity.
- At present, ICT is not used very often in lessons.

Commentary

111. By Year 9, standards exceed those expected of pupils of that age, following a programme of study based on the locally agreed syllabus. Because attainment on entry in Year 7 is average, this represents very good achievement. By Year 11, pupils who choose the subject for GCSE attain well above average standards. Standards are much better than at the time of the

previous inspection. This is because planning, assessment and the quality of teaching are all significantly better. Pupils who do not choose the subject for GCSE study some religious education topics through the PSHE and citizenship days, but not enough to cover all the locally agreed syllabus.

112. Year 9 pupils have a very good understanding of how to construct and use ultimate questions. They have a very secure knowledge and understanding of six major world religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. Their understanding of the importance of baptism in Christianity is excellent and most of them have grasped the difference between infant baptism in the Anglican tradition and believers' baptism in Nonconformist traditions. They have a very good understanding of how religious beliefs affect the rights of the unborn and determine views about abortion. By Year 11, pupils have a very good grasp of the teaching of Christianity on religion, wealth and poverty and can appreciate how this impacts on peace and justice. Their understanding of arguments for the existence of God exceeds that of most pupils of their age.
113. There is some excellent teaching. In a Year 8 lesson the teacher's excellent subject knowledge, skilful management of behaviour and very effective questions, resulted in excellent learning about the story of the temptation of Jesus and of the consequences of giving into temptation in their own lives. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are highly able made rapid gains in their understanding of the relevance of the story for Christians – the teacher skilfully engaging their interest through exciting role-play and making the lesson relevant to their own lives. By the end of the lesson all pupils applied what they had learnt to a meaningful situation in their own lives; this made a very valuable contribution to their personal development.
114. Teachers build in quality time for pupils to think deeply and this makes a valuable contribution to their spiritual development. Teachers focus on raising pupils' awareness of cultural diversity so pupils gain a deeper and better informed respect for people who follow customs that are very different from their own. All of this is achieved in a joyful atmosphere in lessons created by an amazingly good balance of humour, coupled with deep reflection on enormously serious issues.
115. The head of department's very good leadership makes an extremely valuable contribution to pupils' learning. She inspires her colleagues and, consequently, teamwork is outstandingly good. The good assessment procedures, which are developing well, are a very significant improvement since the previous inspection. Although the department has planned for the development of pupils' ICT skills in particular modules of work, so far pupils only use computers occasionally. The governors and headteacher are fully aware of the fact that not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive religious education in accordance with the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and, now that an excellent team of religious education teachers is in place, plans to address this deficiency are underway.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

<i>Standards of work are above average and very high in textiles</i>	<i>Pupils achieve well and very well in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved GCSE grades in 2003 with exceptional results in textiles.
- Imaginative teaching, including an effective focus on pupils' literacy.
- Pupils' very good attitude to learning.
- The developing use of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM).
- Whole-school data on performance has led to improved achievement but marking and assessment in the five disciplines are inconsistent.
- Accommodation for food studies and textiles technology is very poor.

Commentary

116. Standards on entry to the school are about average. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 so that by the end of Year 9 standards are above average. As seen nationally, girls do better than the boys. Higher ability pupils can express their ideas through good annotated sketches. Lower ability pupils generally lack confidence doing things for themselves and rely more on the teachers' guidance and direction. In resistant materials lessons pupils do not spend enough time investigating and evaluating everyday products to help their designing.
117. In Years 10 and 11, standards are highest in textiles, particularly, and food studies where there are some stunning examples of pupils' coursework, for example designs for theatrical costumes, and food products such as cold sweets. This high achievement is due to the GCSE courses being well taught and matched to pupils' interests. Textile technology coursework produced by the more able pupils shows excellent reflection on function and quality in product specifications, and an awareness of different cultures. Prior to writing a manufacturing specification, lower ability pupils, working in resistant materials, research and analyse design issues too superficially and need support to write in depth. In 2003, GCSE results were very high in textiles, significantly above average in food and resistant materials and close to the average in graphics. In 2003, girls did particularly well in all five subjects. Present standards are similar.
118. In the most effective lessons, teachers explain clearly what pupils have to do and use stimulating starter activities that grab pupils' attention from the outset. These lessons are well organised and no time is wasted. Very good lessons are a lively and stimulating combination of high expectations, very good use of questions and expert subject knowledge. High quality classroom displays and well-structured worksheets support pupils' designing and also help them to develop their literacy and numeracy. CAD/CAM is used effectively. Teachers' marking of GCSE projects provides pupils with plenty of guidance on how to improve their work.
119. There is a developing team approach to managing the department and the head of department now monitors teaching and learning. Regular meetings focus on improving standards by evaluating the curriculum and assessment issues. However, the assessment structure is not applied consistently to the five disciplines to provide pupils with coherent feedback on their

progress. Working conditions in the textiles room and food technology rooms are cramped and none of the kitchen units meet modern hygiene standards. This accommodation is, therefore, very poor and is a health and safety issue. Since the last inspection the number of computers has increased and CAD/CAM has been introduced.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

120. **Drama** was sampled. The 2003 GCSE drama results and present standards are above average. This represents good achievement given that pupils have only one lesson a fortnight in Years 7 to 9. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers demand high standards of behaviour and co-operation. Pupils, especially those taking the subject for GCSE, respond well and enjoy the creative challenges, problem solving and decision-making possibilities of group work. GCSE pupils work hard to develop their performance skills and eagerly use the excellent studio facilities to improve their devised pieces. In Years 7 and 8, a few pupils, especially boys, do not yet understand that the subject is both a discipline and an academic subject which requires concentration and controlled behaviour.

121. The leadership and management of this new department are very good. Careful planning ensures that drama makes a considerable contribution to pupils' personal and social development in all years. Although there is only one subject specialist, the teachers work well together and all lessons cover the very important areas of trust and teamwork, involving pupils in evaluating their own and others' performances in an objective, supportive and positive way. Consequently, confidence and self-esteem are developed and pupils help and learn from each other. A very good programme of school productions, many organised by the English department, provides valuable performance opportunities, and theatre visits enrich pupils' experience of different cultures. The latter also build important cross-curricular links and co-operation with other departments.

Art and design

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

<i>Standards of work are well above average, especially in Years 10 and 11</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well, particularly in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The proportion of GCSE A*/A grades is much higher than that seen nationally.
- Teachers' very good marking and feedback to pupils inform them how to improve their work.
- The teachers' high quality attention to each pupil means they develop individual ideas to a high standard.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not plan well enough for both ends of the ability spectrum.

Commentary

122. Pupils enter the school with average ability in art and design. In Years 7 to 9, pupils gain a good understanding in the basic skills of drawing, using colour and pattern in a variety of materials, including three dimensions, and learn about the work of European and other world artists and craftspeople. Year 9 pupils were seen making perceptive comments about food packaging from different countries when considering how it reflected a wide range of cultures.

123. GCSE results in art and design have been consistently well above average since the last inspection and, in 2002 and 2003, three times the national percentage of pupils gained A*/A grades. Over 100 pupils took the examination. Now, well over 150 pupils are following one of the two subjects on offer: art drawing and painting, and art graphics. The decision to offer a course in graphics was specifically to cater for boys' aptitudes. All pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs. A significant proportion of them achieve very well across the five years. Year 10 art graphics pupils take time to master research skills but, by Year 11, they confidently select the right materials and examples on their own, for example on the work of designers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
124. Teaching ranges from very good to satisfactory. All the teachers have very good knowledge of their specialisms. Some use ICT confidently and effectively; Year 7 pupils mastered how to use Photoshop at the same time as becoming familiar with cubism. Teachers are enthusiastic and pupils pick this up. The teachers' selection of very high quality, visual materials and confident, practical demonstrations ensure that all pupils understand what is expected of them.
125. Teachers mark work very thoroughly. Building on their knowledge of each pupil's strengths, they give helpful feedback in lessons and use clear assessment procedures, so they advise pupils how to improve their work very well. However, in a few less effective lessons, teachers do not always plan carefully enough to help pupils who find art and design difficult or to challenge higher attaining pupils – a few individuals struggle to succeed and others feel they could do better. Teaching is consistently better in Years 10 and 11 where teachers effectively focus on the GCSE syllabus and clear assessment criteria. With computer technology being used regularly in the graphics course, boys' achievement has been successfully raised.
126. The very effective team of teachers work together well. The head of department has established very good systems for assessing work, although some adjustment is necessary to standardisation of Year 9 National Curriculum levels. The art and design department makes a very good contribution to pupils' awareness of culture, through looking at artists' work from the UK and abroad, by visiting museums and major London galleries, and by providing vibrant and stimulating displays throughout the school. Since the last inspection, the proportion of A*/A grades has increased, computers are used much more and the refurbished accommodation is much better.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average, especially in Years 10 and 11</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well, particularly in Years 7 to 9</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Passionate and enthusiastic teaching generates equally committed learning.
- The choirs, bands, orchestras and other ensembles involve a significant number of pupils, many of whom learn to play instruments in school.
- Exciting developments in the facilities available over the last two and a half years.
- In all years, access to technology for composition work is difficult.
- Some large classes make some aspects of practical work hard to organise.

Commentary

127. Pupils enter the school with average musical skills, which are developed very successfully. GCSE results have been consistently well above average over the last four years. Standards at this level are being maintained even though a wider ability range can choose the subject. The Year 7 'bumps and crashes' pieces are unusually musical and of good quality, and their work on words and rhythm is complex and structured musically. Singing is a significant strength, and Year 7 pupils sing well in parts. Year 11 pupils have written some very good compositions, with stylistically good piano writing and haunting vocal melodies.
128. Pupils rapidly learn to take musical risks and to evaluate and refine their own work as they go along. Evidence from Year 7 upwards shows the power of musical ensemble and group work, and the pupils' enthusiasm mirrors that of the teachers. Ensemble work helps less able performers to rise to the level of the group and experience the delight of high quality music-making. This has a positive impact on their later work. Pupils with special educational needs make music effectively, and often at a high standard. The most able musicians are encouraged to aim for excellence in class and in extra-curricular ensembles.
129. The high quality teaching is founded on the teachers' passion and encouragement. Relationships in lessons are relaxed but very positive, and so pupils cheerfully try out their musical ideas. The teachers set clear targets which they refine during lessons, taking into account how individuals and groups are doing. Lessons are vibrant and exciting, and pupils learn well, developing skills and using them to make music, and listening well to evaluate their success. Instrumental teaching is also strong, involving a significant number of pupils, and is free for those on examination courses; nearly a fifth of pupils take part in the very lively and high quality extra-curricular programme. In addition to an orchestra, wind and jazz bands and senior and junior choirs, this includes a large number of groups such as strings, clarinets, flutes and brass. Pupils work hard and enjoy them all.
130. The head of department has already had a major impact on the school's musical life. She has built a first-class team which includes highly-valued instrumental teachers, some of whom direct and organise ensembles – a very good use of their expertise. The new accommodation is very good, but the large numbers in some classes make group work difficult and the noise level too high. The topics covered include stimulating music from around the world, which broadens pupils' cultural horizons. The good assessment system links work to National Curriculum levels and examination criteria; self-assessment is a strong feature. The new computers are not yet fully functional, so that they cannot be used easily for composition, which is especially important for the GCSE groups. All the issues raised in the last inspection report have been resolved, apart from access to music technology for composition.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Pupils achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good.</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An excellent range and number of extra-curricular activities.
- Very positive attitudes and excellent relationships between staff and pupils.
- Assessment procedures and schemes of work are satisfactory but the two are not linked closely enough.
- Unsatisfactory indoor accommodation limits pupils' learning.

Commentary

131. Pupils' standards on entry to the school are wide ranging, but are mostly below national expectations, especially in movement activities. By the end of Year 9, pupils attain above average standards in most activities. Year 8 boys are very skilful at rugby and have a good understanding of tactics. Year 9 boys and girls play basketball with much energy and have quickly mastered the new skills involved. In Years 7 to 9, teachers do not always promote deep enough understanding of fitness or give pupils enough opportunities to work independently. Pupils' analytical and evaluative skills are not as well developed as their performance skills, because this aspect of the National Curriculum programme is not sufficiently planned for and taught in lessons.
132. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 attain above average standards because they continue to improve their games and movement skills in their core lessons. GCSE results in 2003 were above average. Present GCSE pupils produce very good quality written work and most have very competent practical expertise. Their standards are at least above average and their achievement is very good, particularly in the practical aspects of the course. As part of the excellent extra-curricular programme, many individual pupils and teams achieve very high standards in district, county and national competitions in netball, cricket, rugby, football, hockey and swimming. These talented pupils benefit greatly from the excellent opportunities their teachers provide. The school netball teams have been national champions at all ages and boys and girls have many opportunities to travel, in the UK and abroad, to play fixtures and tournaments.
133. The overall very good teaching, combined with pupils' very positive attitudes and excellent relationships, contributes significantly to the strong progress pupils make. In excellent and very good lessons, teachers are enthusiastic and energetic and quickly improve pupils' performances by giving them much time to practise progressive skills. Teachers give pupils a good visual image on which to base their performance. Pupils' learning benefits by the teachers circulating well, extending the more able and helping those pupils who find an activity difficult. This is a positive strategy that gives great encouragement to all pupils. Teachers give much encouraging and sensitive support to pupils with disabilities, who achieve very highly.
134. The head of department sets monitoring targets, for example of the setting of GCSE groups, and leads by his own very good example in his teaching. The department makes a strong contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development through the extensive extra-curricular activities programme; it has developed many community links with pupils, schools and clubs in this country and abroad. Currently, areas of assessment and curriculum planning are not detailed enough to establish a clear link between the two and to plan for literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils are assessed and informed about their performance but pupils' understanding of how to improve their level of work in each activity is an area for further development.
135. The facilities are unsatisfactory overall because the two small gymnasias do not allow higher standards of performance to be attained in indoor games such as badminton and basketball. The changing rooms in the school are dingy, dilapidated and cramped and not appropriate for the often large teaching groups. However, good improvements have been made since the previous inspection and Sportsmark Gold has been awarded.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

136. **Business** was sampled. GCSE results improved significantly in 2003 with one in five pupils attaining grade A – well above average. In a selective scrutiny of pupils' work, it was clear that pupils learn well – their notes are well organised and they use ICT effectively. Progress from Year 10 to Year 11 is clear, with more complex ideas being developed and with more critical thought. One GCSE class and one GNVQ class were seen. Standards overall were average.

The content and teachers' knowledge were good, but a significant minority of pupils did not work quietly and lacked concentration, reducing the impact of the teaching and resulting in poorer learning and achievement than might otherwise have happened. The department should review how it manages pupils to improve learning for all.

137. **Child development** was sampled. This is a valuable and worthwhile course for the girls who choose it, as several of them hope to pursue careers in this area. GCSE results are above average and many pupils achieve well. Teaching is satisfactory. The teacher guides pupils logically through the course but some pupils do not organise their notes well, which makes these less helpful for revision. Pupils write high quality coursework and particularly enjoy the unit based on observations of a child. More role-play and group work would help to break up the lessons, as some pupils find it hard to concentrate for an hour. The teacher shows up-to-date videos, selects extracts well and carefully points out where bias may exist in commercial organisation publications. The lack of a dedicated room makes it hard for the teacher to use a wide range of resources, as these have to be carried to many different rooms. Neither can pupils' work be displayed effectively. Pupils do not use ICT enough in lessons or in their coursework.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

During the inspection it was not possible to see any teaching of either of these subjects, due to the timetable arrangements. Therefore, no overall provision judgement has been made. The report describes the subjects together.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The suspension of the timetable for whole and half days, to deliver PSHE and citizenship, is seen by pupils and staff as being very successful.
- The school is piloting an innovative scheme for the assessment of standards in citizenship.
- The contribution of other subjects to pupils' knowledge and understanding of citizenship is variable; pupils should be made aware of those issues they study which form part of the National Curriculum for citizenship.

Commentary

138. The national guidelines on the topics which should be studied in PSHE have been carefully mapped out beside the school's programme. Coverage of the required sex education, relationships and drugs education elements of the PSHE programme is good. Theatre organisations, such as SNAP and Arc, organise workshops which help pupils to consider these issues with the support of experts. ICT programmes, such as Drugsense and Drug, are also valuable resources. There is considerable overlap between the national guidelines for PSHE and the National Curriculum for citizenship, and the school has worked hard to develop a logical programme which addresses both subjects properly. It is early days yet, but the evidence seen suggests that it is effective and that the school will keep the activities under constant review.
139. In Years 7 to 9, 'knowledge and understanding of becoming an informed citizen' is developed through topics such as the police, crime and punishment, the courts and the work of the local council. In an interesting exercise, Year 8 pupils were asked by the mayor to decide how they would spend £10,000 on the local community. Year 7 pupils spent a day shadowing an adult at work. There are visits to the Houses of Parliament and a Hindu temple. The role of the media is investigated in Year 10. A number of subjects contribute to this element of citizenship, especially in Years 7 to 9. Religious education and English discuss the diversity of religious and ethnic identity in the UK. Special texts have been purchased for English work. The history department has added lessons on different forms of government and conflict prior to studying the rise of Hitler or Martin Luther King. Opportunities to develop 'skills of enquiry and communication', the second element of citizenship, are provided in most subjects, but a

specific unit is taught through ICT in work on elections and the European Union; this interesting unit was taught well during the inspection and pupils' achievement was good.

140. The development of 'skills of participation and responsible action' are certainly available in a number of areas, such as voting in school council elections, deciding which charities to support and taking part in prefect duties. Many pupils are involved in the very active outdoor clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award requires them to undertake voluntary work in the community. This element is also covered in Year 9 drama work on *Blood Brothers* where pupils reflect on the process of participation. What the school has yet to monitor closely is the degree to which all pupils are involved. Neither must it let non-compulsory subjects at GCSE count as covering key citizenship topics.
141. The school is developing an innovative approach to the assessment of citizenship. Tasks are set, completed, marked and returned to pupils with feedback, all online. It is intended that, by the summer of 2004, this approach will be used with all pupils. Discussions with staff and pupils reveal real enthusiasm for the suspended timetable approach to PSHE/citizenship. Pupils enjoyed the days and felt the activities were worthwhile. Staff thought the new arrangements were a great improvement on the previous system. This positive view was supported by governors, some of whom had attended the PSHE/citizenship days.
142. Whilst it is clear that many aspects of citizenship are being covered by the school, the subject lacks coherence in pupils' eyes. Often they are not aware that citizenship topics are being studied, which can lead to a fragmented view of the whole subject. Whilst a number of subjects are making an effective contribution to citizenship teaching, the school should monitor the extent to which this is the case and the amount of detail they cover.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Taken in Year 13		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	6 (9)	83 (89)	--- (81.6)	0 (0)	--- (33.2)	26.7 (22.2)	--- (30.9)
Business studies	4 (5)	75 (100)	--- (89.1)	0 (20)	--- (31.7)	22.5 (38.0)	--- (33.2)
Chemistry	3 (2)	100 (100)	--- (84.8)	0 (0)	--- (36.9)	26.7 (25.0)	--- (35.2)
Drama	2	100 (100)	--- (94.6)	0	--- (37.6)	25.0	--- (39.1)
English literature	1 (4)	100 (25)	--- (94.4)	100 (0)	--- (37.9)	50.0 (5.0)	--- (38.9)
French	11 (5)	73 (80)	--- (85.4)	9 (20)	--- (35.2)	22.7 (22.0)	--- (34.9)
European studies	8 (9)	63 (78)	--- (83.2)	13 (11)	--- (32.5)	25.0 (27.8)	--- (33.6)
General studies	24 (29)	88 (55)	--- (88.3)	29 (3)	--- (36.4)	31.3 (15.3)	--- (30.0)
Mathematics	3 (8)	67 (75)	--- (74.2)	0 (0)	--- (34.3)	25.7 (22.5)	--- (31.3)
Physical education	3 (4)	100 (50)	--- (83.2)	33 (0)	--- (32.5)	33.3 (15.0)	--- (33.6)
Religious education	1 (1)	100 (100)	--- (90.9)	0 (0)	--- (38.9)	20.0 (30.0)	--- (37.9)

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	35 (33)	100 (100)	--- (96.1)	57.1 (67.0)	--- (48.7)	93.8 (98.8)	--- (85.1)
AVCE Art Graphics	4 (2)	100 (100)	--- (89)	25.0 (50.0)	--- (27.4)	72.5 (80.0)	--- (69.4)
Biology	11 (12)	90.9 (100)	--- (91.6)	45.5 (41.7)	--- (36.3)	70.9 (86.7)	--- (74.1)
Business studies	16 (17)	100 (94.1)	--- (96.4)	37.5 (29.4)	--- (32.8)	81.3 (78.8)	--- (76.5)
AVCE Business studies	12 (21)	100 (92.9)	--- (87.1)	29.2 (16.7)	--- (16.5)	75.8 (64.8)	--- (60.1)
Chemistry	16 (16)	100 (100)	--- (94.0)	56.3 (50.0)	--- (45.9)	86.3 (85.0)	--- (81.1)
English literature	47(39)	97.8 (100)	--- (98.5)	44.7 (46.2)	--- (43.7)	86.3 (91.3)	--- (84.3)
Design technology	6 (2)	100 (100)	--- (95.3)	0 (0)	--- (35.5)	50 (60)	--- (76.5)

Drama and Theatre studies	15	100	--- (98.1)	46.7	--- (41.5)	86.6	--- (82.9)
French	12 (16)	91.6 (68.8)	--- (96.2)	66.6 (12.5)	--- (46.1)	86.6 (45.0)	--- (83.0)
General studies	103 (83)	98 (95.2)	--- (90.1)	32.0 (34.9)	--- (29.1)	76.7 (76.9)	--- (69.3)
Geography	57 (35)	100 (100)	--- (97.1)	31.6 (45.7)	--- (40.5)	77.5 (87.4)	--- (80.9)
German	4 (3)	75 (66.7)	--- (96.3)	0 (33.3)	--- (44.3)	50 (60)	--- (82.1)
Government and politics	7 (11)	100 (100)	--- (94.3)	57.1 (18.2)	--- (38.9)	88.6 (69.1)	--- (77.7)
History	36 (28)	100 (100)	--- (97.1)	30.6 (50.0)	--- (41.0)	81.7 (86.4)	--- (81.2)
Mathematics	21 (22)	100 (100)	--- (93.3)	52.4 (36.4)	--- (52.2)	89.5 (82.7)	--- (84.7)
Media studies	25 (19)	100 (100)	--- (98.3)	16.0 (21.1)	--- (36.8)	72.8 (75.8)	--- (75.8)
Music	1	100	--- (97.7)	100	--- (41.8)	120	--- (82.2)
Physics	11 (15)	100 (86.7)	--- (92.8)	36.4 (13.3)	--- (42.8)	81.8 (61.3)	--- (78.6)
Religious studies	8 (8)	100 (100)	--- (96.3)	75.0 (50.0)	--- (44.0)	100 (90.0)	--- (82.2)
Sports studies	19 (11)	94.7 (90.0)	--- (95.4)	26.3 (27.3)	--- (29.5)	68.4 (69.1)	--- (73.2)

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

143. English and French were examined in depth and German was sampled. Students have not been as successful in German as in their other subjects in recent years. In 2003, A-level results were average. There are currently only three students studying German in both of Years 12 and 13. However, in both lessons seen teaching and learning were very good. Standards are average in Year 12 and well above average in Year 13. Students are achieving well.

English

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

<i>Standards of work are well above average, especially in Year 13</i>	<i>Students achieve well in Year 12 and very well in Year 13</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching ensures that learning is both challenging and enjoyable.
- Students' excellent relationships, high level of commitment and enjoyment of literature make a significant contribution to their very good achievement.
- Very good subject management ensures that teachers and students use assessment information well to identify areas for improvement.

- Students do not always show sufficient awareness of authors' style and purpose in their essay writing.

Commentary

144. Students start the courses with a wide range of ability. They readily and competently discuss and debate a range of social, moral, cultural and ethical issues which arise from their texts. The most able write very good, independent responses in their close analytical skills. Their essays are well organised and fluent, referring to apt quotations to support their arguments. Less able students have problems with their essays, for example often writing about characters and plots as if they are real people and events and not literary constructs. Although these students can usually identify the main features of form, language and structure, they do not show a detailed understanding of the texts' impact on the reader or audience.
145. Students have very positive attitudes and show strong commitment to the course. They enjoy literature and, because of the excellent relationships they have with their teachers, they both support and challenge each other superbly. They work very well, collaboratively and independently, especially when they are given choices about how to tackle assignments. Their learning is enhanced by regular use of ICT for research and presentation, and their experience of English is enriched through a good range of theatre trips, visiting writers and very close links with the learning resource centre and the drama department.
146. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and know their students very well. They challenge them in discussion and debate and use many stimulating teaching techniques to help them to develop as effective independent learners. Particular strengths of teaching are the teachers' excellent exemplification of the examination board's grade descriptors, to show students exactly what they need to do to improve, and the department's impressive use of questionnaires to identify students' learning needs, to check their progress and provide focused support.
147. The large team in the department thinks, listens and constantly reviews and evaluates practice in order to improve standards even further. Communication, teamwork and planning are very good, and the department's work is monitored well and enhanced by a first-rate programme of professional development for staff. Since the previous inspection the number of students has increased considerably, yet overall, standards and achievement continue to improve. The department has also established a very robust assessment policy. This ensures that all students are kept informed of their progress and helped to set their targets and write their action plans.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

148. Standards are above average. Students' speaking and listening skills are especially strong because there are many opportunities for discussions in all lessons and students are very willing to share their ideas. With excellent resources in the learning resource centre, students have no excuse not to read widely around topics, although a few teachers comment that they have to encourage them to do this. Whilst most students use the Internet regularly for research, there is evidence that, occasionally, they are not critical of the quality of the material they download. Students write well, though their essays are not always carefully planned and structured.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>

<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A strong team of expert teachers provides students with a rich learning experience.
- The subject is very well led.
- Work experience in France is a boost to students' language skills and personal development.
- Comparatively few students choose to study French in the sixth form.

Commentary

149. In 2003, two-thirds of students attained high A-level grades. Almost all achieved well. A disappointing speaking test performance affected AS-level results, which were average overall. Effective steps have been taken this year to improve students' oral skills. Students in Year 12 find the transition from GCSE difficult at first. However, they are enthusiastic and committed, and are achieving well. Standards of writing in the AS-level class are average overall. Whilst lower attaining students continue to make basic errors of grammar, most students write substantial, accurate essays. Students' speaking and listening are above average. They are increasingly fluent, and are developing good discussion and debating skills. They have very good understanding of French spoken at native speed. At the end of Year 12, students benefit greatly from a week's work experience in France – a timely boost to their language skills and a valuable contribution to their personal development.
150. There are only four students in the current Year 13, who are achieving very well. They have confident writing skills and write long, fluent essays on complex topics, expressing sophisticated ideas well. Students have developed excellent listening skills, and understand all their teachers say without difficulty. They read widely, and are enthusiastic and regular watchers of French cinema. They use ICT well to help their studies. For instance, they use the Internet for research, and draft and redraft written work by wordprocessor.
151. Teaching and learning are often excellent. The teachers are fluent French speakers and very good role models. Lessons are conducted entirely in French, most effectively developing students' speaking and listening skills. All lessons are very well planned, with interesting, varied and well-sequenced activities. Teachers have excellent questioning techniques, which stretch, build confidence and bring out the best in students. All benefit from the first-class learning materials, and effective learning support aids are provided for less confident students. The expert way in which teachers handle discussion of important or sensitive issues promotes students' citizenship knowledge and skills, as well as their personal development.
152. The strong and effective team of teachers works together very well, and takes prompt action to make any necessary adjustments to provision. Although improvement since the last inspection has been good, numbers studying languages in the sixth form have fallen, and it is important that steps be taken to promote the study of modern foreign languages in the sixth form.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Students achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Above average AS and A-level results and good achievement have raised students' confidence to complete their course.
- Very good leadership has improved the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers' high expectation results in high levels of application.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is well matched to the syllabuses covered.
- The absence of sharply focused learning targets results in some students not knowing what they need to do to improve.
- The limited use of ICT sometimes reduces the depth of students' understanding.

Commentary

153. The department's good provision and above average results are highly respected by students and many of them study the subject for two years. Although the number of female A-level students dropped dramatically in 2003, the present proportion of female to male students more closely reflects the school population. Data and work seen during the inspection, confirm that teaching and learning add good value to the students' GCSE levels and that there is no significant difference in the performance of female, male or minority ethnic students. They all make at least good progress.
154. Very good leadership since the last inspection has significantly improved teaching and learning. They are now good in over four out of five lessons. The development of teachers' very good subject knowledge, to provide good approaches to learning mental calculation methods, is effectively raising students' numeracy and calculus skills. The routine practice of providing clear and challenging learning objectives means that most students efficiently apply previous learning, work independently and assess their progress. The limited use of ICT to develop and extend learning, for example to explore concepts in calculus, sometimes reduces their depth of understanding.
155. The department's thorough analysis of the students' attainment and overall progress by teaching groups and gender leads to effective adjustments being made to the curriculum and the planning of some lessons. However, as teachers do not frequently assess and measure individual performance against learning objectives, the identification and setting of sharply focused learning targets for students are difficult. This results in some students, of all abilities, not knowing exactly what they need to do to improve.
156. Good management has improved resources and ensured a good match of teacher expertise to the demands of the syllabuses. The department is in a strong position to implement the national changes to AS and A-level due in September 2004.

Mathematics across the curriculum

157. Links between the mathematics department and other subjects have improved the overall provision of numeracy in the sixth form and, in particular, have had a positive impact on the school's success in vocational courses and Key Skills tests. In subjects such as science, geography and business studies, students develop their mental calculation skills and learn how to analyse statistics in detail. Students spoken to in mathematics lessons can identify how they transfer skills to their other subjects. Some use their statistics module coursework to develop work in other subjects. However, it is not helpful that the small number of students in Year 12 who wish to retake their GCSE mathematics have no timetabled lessons with mathematics teachers.

SCIENCE

158. Biology and physics were sampled and chemistry looked at in depth. Teaching was consistently good in the biology lessons. In a very good Year 12 physics lesson, the teacher captured the students' imagination so that they became engrossed in the topic. She used a good variety of techniques to hold their interest and video clips to find out how well they had learned to interpret graphs of distance, velocity and acceleration against time. The group was working at a higher level than expected for this stage in the course, and achievement was good.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Students achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy studying chemistry and work hard to do their best. This helps them to learn well, and in some lessons they learn very well.
- Good teaching has made chemistry a popular subject – the number of students choosing it is increasing.
- Teachers do not always do enough to bring out the relationships between different areas of the subject.
- Teachers know exactly what students need to do in order to do well in examinations. They use this information to help their students, including those who are very able, to gain high grades.

Commentary

159. Students have a wide range of interests; some are committed scientists following two or three science subjects and others study a more varied curriculum. Their GCSE grades vary from A* to C so that, overall, their attainment at the beginning of Year 12 is typical. They quickly learn to think as chemists do, and this helps them to progress rapidly. After one term, they do work of an above average standard. In an introductory lesson on the variety of organic compounds, all the students learned well how to use structural and displayed formulae. In another Year 12 lesson, they quickly learned how to use standard enthalpy changes. Most of them do well in their module tests and continue into Year 13, where they gain above average A-level results.
160. In both years, the most able students learn very well, and regularly gain entry to highly regarded universities. A Year 12 student has reached the final stage of a national chemistry competition. Students with more modest attainment are well supported, so that they too achieve well. They learn how to respond to challenges logically and how to think, often gaining higher grades than predicted.
161. Teachers understand their students well, and help them to do their best. They engage in good discussions, asking questions which make students think deeply and learn quickly. In a Year 13 practical session where students were attempting iodine titrations for the first time, the teacher set the requirement for accuracy at just the right level, emphasising the need for careful, clean work but not allowing the quest for accuracy to stand in the way of understanding the key principles. In a Year 12 lesson, a scholarly yet relaxed atmosphere meant that students learned from one another as well as from the teacher. In lessons which were good, rather than very good, the teacher did not do enough to bring out the relationships between different areas of the subject.

162. The head of department has a very clear vision for the progress of the subject, and her success so far is indicated by the improving results and numbers taking the subject. She monitors students' progress well. Students, in turn, know what their targets are and how to achieve them, because their teachers communicate a secure understanding of examination standards to them. The head of department holds regular meetings with her colleagues and promotes a high level of consistency.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Students achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new AVCE course has attracted very good numbers and made an effective start.
- Knowledgeable and hardworking staff prepare well-structured lessons so that students, whatever their prior experience, make good progress.
- Co-operative working between all parties nurtures an ethos of support and learning in and out of lessons.
- Committed, hardworking and enthusiastic students learn very effectively and produce good quality coursework portfolios.
- Good, thoughtful and effective management contributes to the very strong leadership and direction to the subject.

Commentary

163. The school had not offered a sixth-form ICT qualification before September 2003, so only Year 12 students were observed during the inspection. Standards in lessons and in coursework portfolios are good. All lessons start well. The students arrive punctually and a business-like attitude to learning is established. Teachers teach well because they are well prepared, know their subject in depth and have good general teaching skills. Students learn well because they are very keen and interested and take an active part, listening attentively and following instructions sensibly. They get on with their tasks with great maturity and work together supportively. For example, a group of four female students shared their understanding of a task and how they were going to complete it. When anyone got stuck another helped, sharing knowledge and at the same time consolidating their own learning. Thus, students make very good progress.
164. The significantly improved resources since the last inspection help, with a very good range of computer software installed. Teachers have mastered the characteristics of these programs, with detailed knowledge and understanding of their applications. This means that students have very good access to the right equipment and programs, which they can use both in and out of lessons. Students have high aspirations and see this new course as offering both a support to their other subjects as well as an opportunity for further study.
165. Leadership of the team of very proficient teachers is very good and day-to-day matters are managed well. The head of department has very good vision of how the subject will grow, and leads with a sense of purpose. The accommodation in terms of machines and equipment is good and recently refurbished, but heating and ventilation are a problem. With the new staffing, very good leadership and refurbished accommodation, signs are already in place that initial progress will continue and accelerate further.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

166. Sixth-form students regularly use ICT for research and presenting their work. Many have computers at home and use the equipment at school to develop work, particularly coursework, which they complete later. Students use computers in the learning resource centre or simply drop in to a computer room, even when it is being used. It is quite normal to have a class, individual pupils and sixth-form students all working side by side. When the task is complete, students simply leave and return to their work elsewhere.
167. Sixth-form students use the Internet for research, mainly using the information well and being reasonably selective as to the value they place on its content. Some of them evaluate the worth of different sources very sensibly. They can select the correct programs to produce written or presentation work that is well matched to audience. There are significantly more computers available than at the time of the last inspection and these are maintained to a very high standard.

HUMANITIES

168. History, sociology, and government and politics were sampled and geography and religious education were examined in depth. Provision for history in the sixth form is very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve well. In the last two years, two-thirds of students have attained A/B grades. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent because teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and plan extremely well. Students learn very well and respond with interest, hard work and good organisation. History in the sixth form is very well led and managed, mirroring the strengths to be found in the main school. Standards in **government and politics** are well above average. In 2003, seven students took and passed A-level, four with A/B grades.
169. One lesson of Year 12 **sociology**, a new subject, was seen. The teacher has excellent subject expertise and recognises the benefits of engaging students through a variety of approaches. The lesson involved two outside speakers who spoke about their experiences at school and skilfully highlighted many aspects of educational diversity. Teaching and learning were both very good and students achieved very well.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An excellent team of specialist teachers who inspire students to attain high levels of academic achievement.
- Highly committed and energetic students who respond enthusiastically to the high quality of teaching.
- First-class field study activities locally, in other UK regions and abroad.

Commentary

170. AS and A-level results, and the standards seen during the inspection, are well above average. All students have passed A-level since 2000, reflecting the department's commitment to excellence. It is the most popular sixth-form subject, with almost 60 students taking A-level in 2003, of whom nearly one in three attained A/B grades. Females did particularly well against their predicted grades. The department is currently addressing this issue by adapting their teaching methods.
171. Much A-level work clearly reflects the positive progress students make over the two-year course. AS-level files are more patchy, but work rate and standards are still high. Students have good knowledge and conceptual understanding of key issues and processes in physical and human geography. They are particularly adept at seeing cause and effect between these two strands – a key skill for A-level. A good balance is achieved between students undertaking research and the teachers directing them. Students are well focused and enjoy applying new knowledge and skills to practical problems and case studies.
172. Teaching is of a high quality and some is excellent, challenging and inspirational, and it is clear that the teachers have very extensive geographical knowledge. They bring out the best in students by developing their understanding of concepts and strengthening their knowledge and application. Role-play activities, such as one generating responses to a hurricane, are of a very high quality. A programme of well-structured and meticulously-planned fieldwork activities locally, across the UK and in Europe and the USA, reinforces students' learning extremely well. Relationships are good, so complex issues are debated in a positive and friendly environment. A significant strength is how, at the beginning of lessons, the teachers share the key points they want students to learn and understand.
173. Teachers mark longer essays and exercises very well and provide students with clear, supportive judgements on their work. Most students can synthesise information and facts and talk authoritatively on aspects of their work. Year 12 students contributed sensible ideas to a lively debate on a local planning application. ICT skills pervade the students' work, particularly in their field study folders. The department makes it easy for students to read journals, example essays and guidance materials by liaising very well with the librarian in the learning resource centre, which is good practice. The new, enthusiastic and positive head of department has inherited a strong team ethos which pervades all planning work.

Religious education

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

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improving results, with students achieving well and getting grades that are above those predicted by their GCSE results.
- Very good teaching – teachers use their excellent knowledge of the subject and a very good variety of teaching methods to interest and challenge students.
- Mature students who are able to use specialist language well, and evaluate and analyse complex concepts in a sensitive and thoughtful manner.
- On occasions, teachers do not make sure that all students contribute to discussions.

Commentary

174. In the last three years there has been a steady increase in the number of students taking the subject. Standards have risen and results were well above average in 2003; present students are well on target to continue this trend. Year 12 students use specialist language well and have a very good understanding of complex philosophical theories. In one lesson, students confidently discussed Bentham's Hedonic calculus, having been tested on their knowledge in a fun, opening bingo session. The picture is similar in Year 13. Students' folders not only show their very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, they also contain work which demonstrates very good evaluative and analytical skills. These were well illustrated in a class discussion on the value of religious experience when arguing for the existence of God.
175. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to challenge students to produce high quality work. They plan lessons very well, include a very good variety of teaching methods and organise tasks clearly. As a result, lessons proceed at an excellent pace. An interesting ranking exercise, linked to a study of JS Mill's and Bentham's theories, helped a Year 12 lesson to move forward quickly and it also helped students to apply the premises to real life effectively. Most of the students are motivated and make a good contribution in discussions, but a small minority does not play an active part. Discussions need to be more carefully manipulated so that all students are fully involved.
176. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly and carry out helpful assessments with clear targets. As a result, students have a very clear understanding of how to improve their work. Students are encouraged to develop independent learning skills using ICT. A strong team spirit exists between the committed teachers. They use assessment data well, with excellent evaluation. Since the last inspection there has been a very good improvement in results and teaching is much better.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

177. Design and technology was sampled. A small numbers of students follow the AS-level course in product design and very small numbers continue to A-level. 2003 results were just below average. Those students with strong literacy skills do well in product case studies on, for example 'The Biro®'. However, the quality of their product fabrication is not as strong. Design folios show satisfactory analytical skills and some good quality technical illustration making use of state-of-the-art CAD software. Achievement is satisfactory in both years and teaching and learning are good. In the most effective lessons, teachers ask students probing questions and they manage and organise lessons well so no time is wasted. CAD is used effectively to support design work using solid modelling techniques. Personal, weekly tutorials support students well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

178. Media studies and music were sampled. Art and drama were examined in depth. Two media studies lessons were seen, one of which was excellent. Teaching and learning are very good. Students respond eagerly and sensitively to a range of media texts and, in their lessons and practical work, they are beginning to use and understand the subject's specialist language and concepts very well. Standards of work are average and achievement is good.
179. Over the last four years, music results have been well above average. Students learn very well and respond extremely positively to the very good and enthusiastic teaching. Although numbers taking music are small, they are growing and, when the technology is on line, the composition element of the course will be better supported and other courses can be considered. Music students support main-school activities well; for example, a Year 13 girl accompanies the junior choir. They also act as valuable role models in many school ensembles. Singing in up to four parts is a significant strength of the department's work.

Art and design

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

<i>Standards of work are well above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been very good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High quality, personal attention from teachers encourages very individual interpretations of themes.
- Increased use of computer technology has improved standards of presentation in historical, critical studies.
- The study of multiculturalism contributes extremely well to students' awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural elements.
- Students' very good attitudes contribute positively to their quality of learning.

Commentary

180. Art and design is a popular subject, with between 20 and 30 plus students taking the fine art or graphics courses every year. In 2003, many students gained A/B grades. Female students carry out their research very carefully and take great care in how they present their work – a slightly higher percentage of them attained A/B grades in 2002 and 2003. Standards are higher in fine art than graphics, but students achieve very well in both disciplines. The exploration into multiculturalism has stimulated very exciting work, which students have approached from diverse angles. The sensitivity of feeling is evident in how universal problems such as drug use and abuse, poverty and wealth, and religion across the world are explored through themes such as body adornment, dance and music.
181. The well above average standards are due to the good overall quality of teaching, some of which is very good. In the best teaching, planning is extensive with a wide range of visual material to stimulate ideas and promote discussion. The teachers' delivery inspires and motivates students to be creative and productive. Work is regularly reviewed, clear guidance given on how to improve and challenging questions asked to encourage students' best efforts. ICT is used most effectively to develop and expand ideas and the outcomes are impressive.
182. The best teaching, involving personal attention, encourages independent learning and an exceptional depth and diversity of ideas. The higher attaining students' journals are of superb standard. In the small amount of less effective teaching, planning does not always reach these high standards but, because groups are shared between two or more teachers, the effect of this inadequate planning is diluted. Nevertheless, this has an effect, especially on lower attaining students' work.
183. All teachers have an opportunity to teach A-level courses, and relationships between students and teachers are very good. At best, this leads to rich and diverse development of students' skills and minimises the effect of the satisfactory teaching. Assessment procedures are rigorous and ensure students understand how to improve their work. A number of trips to major London galleries inform and inspire work. Standards have always been above average by the end of Year 13 but, with the advent of AS-level courses in recent years, standards by the end of Year 12 have risen.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

<i>Standards of work are well above average, particularly in performance</i>	<i>Students achieve very well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are totally committed and their achievement is very good.
- Standards of performance are well above average.
- Very good teaching challenges and inspires all students. The lead teacher has excellent subject knowledge and experience.
- There is a strong programme of extra-curricular activities and very good opportunities for performing.
- Excellent studio facilities allow students to explore the technical possibilities of drama.

Commentary

184. The school entered its first group for A-level in 2003. These, and AS-level results were above average. Present standards of written and performance work are high. The most able students research thoroughly, using the learning resource centre and the Internet well to investigate writers, plays, themes, leading practitioners and historical, social and cultural contexts as well. Their diaries and notebooks reflect their very good awareness of the courses' assessment objectives and, consequently, their writing is usually fluent and carefully analytical, with interpretations well justified and illustrated. Their planning and story-boarding are also very good, as are their devised scripts – these show their thorough understanding of practitioners such as Brecht and Stanislavski. Their textual studies and annotation are perceptive and mature and their discussion and problem-solving skills are excellent. The few less able students do not always prepare thoroughly enough; their folders contain limited evidence of the concepts and conventions of drama which they have studied, or their ability to apply them to their own work.
185. Ensemble, improvisation and teamwork are excellent in all classes and acting standards are well above average. Students readily explore ideas and themes together; they challenge and support each other and work quickly and creatively. They use voice, body language, space and levels well to give very effective presentations and know how to shape and direct performances. Their ability to evaluate their own and others' work is assured and their constructive and perceptive comments bring about immediate improvement.
186. Achievement is very good because of students' commitment and enthusiasm and the high quality enrichment programme available. Frequent theatre trips, visiting theatre groups, drama competitions and regular school productions provide superb opportunities for students to observe and learn and to develop and improve their own stage experience. Their knowledge of citizenship and their moral, cultural and ethical awareness are considerably enhanced through their studies and through presentations of themes such as political power and its abuse, and the use of theatre for propaganda and social education, as well as entertainment. Links with other subjects such as English and music are very strong, and those with the School of the Science of Acting and the Palace Theatre, Watford are developing well.

187. Students say that the teaching often inspires them to go beyond what they thought possible. Lessons are stimulating, challenging and enjoyable. Students are thoroughly involved in assessment procedures and appreciate that drama is both an art and a discipline. In the excellent new drama studio, students learn to use lighting and sound equipment to create dramatic effects and impact; they use digital and video cameras to record, evaluate and improve their performances. However, the teachers' valuable student mentoring time is sometimes lost because no technical assistance is available to set up specialist equipment. Innovation and experimentation are the keys to this new department's success.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education for A-level is **good**. There is no provision for physical education for all students except through extra-curricular activities.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Students achieve well</i>
<i>Teaching is very good</i>	<i>Learning is very good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve particularly well in practical work. In Year 13, some students perform at a very high level.
- Very good teaching leads to well-focused learning.
- Excellent relationships and the students' excellent attitudes.
- Excellent extra-curricular provision.
- There is no allocated time for organised games for all sixth-form students.

Commentary

188. In recent years the percentage of A-level A/B grades has been above average but this fell in 2003. The AS-level results were above average and achievement was very good. Analysis of results shows that students' standards are better in portfolio and practical work than in the physiological aspects of the course. Year 13 students are very good performers and take part in at least one sport to a very high level. Students' achievement is good in relation to their abilities and overall GCSE performance. The course is becoming equally popular with female and male students.

189. The productive work ethos in most lessons is a reflection of the very good teaching and learning. When teachers directly link practical work to the theoretical aspects of the courses, as in two Year 13 lessons observed, one about a specific training technique and another aimed at developing sports analysis, students enjoy the topics and their knowledge and understanding increase rapidly. When Year 12 students were encouraged to work in pairs to answer examination questions, they helped one another and made thoughtful and perceptive comments using physiological vocabulary accurately.

190. Students' good achievement is firmly rooted in the excellent relationships which teachers establish. As a result, students work at or near their capacity and make significant progress. Teaching and learning are particularly effective when students are encouraged to research topics for homework and come well prepared to discuss their findings in class. Students use ICT in the production of their personal exercise programmes. However, they do not have sufficient access to computers in lessons because there are no resources in the teaching

base. This considerably limits planning for independent and collaborative research, as a class activity.

191. The department is very well managed and much has been achieved since the head of department recently established several successful monitoring initiatives. Good improvements since the previous inspection include comprehensive planning and the provision of a teaching base. Students enjoy and learn from the excellent range and quality of the extra-curricular activities, and they report how much they value the courses because they provide an accreditation linked to their proposed careers, in sports science for example. It is disappointing with such a wealth of talent, that the school does not provide the time for organised sixth-form lessons for all students.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

<i>Standards of work are above average</i>	<i>Students achieve very well in AVCE and well in A-level</i>
<i>Teaching is good</i>	<i>Learning is good</i>
<i>Leadership is very good</i>	<i>Management is very good</i>
<i>Improvement since the last inspection has been good</i>	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership and management of the department provide energetic and thoughtful direction to its work.
- Teaching is frequently very good, although some classes lack pace and challenge.
- Resources are very good, providing the conditions for sound learning.
- Assessment of students' work is thorough and painstaking, as is record keeping, and these contribute to students' understanding of how to improve.
- Female students are under-represented in sixth-form classes, and do less well than in business studies in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

192. Results over the last two years have been mixed: above average in the AVCE course and average at A-level. The department is aware of this inconsistency and is taking steps to raise standards, for example with more careful monitoring of students' progress, and extra work sessions for those failing to meet targets. Relatively few females take business studies (none in Year 13) so the department should consider further how it can make the subject more attractive to them.

193. Standards of work seen were frequently impressive, particularly in AVCE. Here, very well presented portfolios show very good achievement across the two years. All, without exception, are neat and well arranged, with good use of ICT. AVCE students are very committed to their studies and in lessons there is an atmosphere of attention, interest and enthusiasm for learning. In a class on motivation, AVCE students needed little prompting when they discussed their complex reading in a sophisticated way and related it to theory. They excelled themselves and worked at a level beyond expectations. In an A-level class on budgeting and spreadsheets, students worked collaboratively and with great interest, helping each other and asking astute questions that showed insight and understanding. The key ingredient here was the varied and stimulating teaching.

194. In another very good lesson, the teacher had the confidence to put the lesson plan aside and get students to listen to that morning's Radio 4 broadcast on business investment in Estonia –

a stimulating insight into a practical question. Teachers set a good pace and challenge, have an excellent relationship with the students and encourage them towards independent learning and a willingness to push forward. However, in a minority of classes, teaching is only satisfactory. Here, although materials are good, too much is attempted, which means that students do not learn so well because there is not enough time for them to get involved actively and study topics in depth.

195. Overall, marking is thorough and informative and, particularly in AVCE, is carefully documented and tracked. Students are required to keep good records and organise themselves well, and this contributes to good learning. Attention to detail is a notable feature of this very well managed department. It is also led in an enthusiastic and caring way that contributes much to its effectiveness. Excellent facilities and bright, airy and well-equipped main teaching rooms also help. The quality of assessment and the provision of ICT equipment are much improved since the last inspection.
196. The school already had valuable links with a large bank when it acquired Business and Enterprise Specialist status – awarded in the academic year 2002 to 2003. The bank provides work experience for students and guarantees to employ those who complete the AVCE course. Several students have carved out very worthwhile careers with the bank. So far, the school is interpreting its new status to address what employees need: ‘People who understand the business environment, have ICT skills and are literate and numerate’. Thus, specialist money has funded the developing literacy, numeracy, French and ICT bridging projects, the purchase of 32 laptops for primary schools, AVCE ICT, fast-track GCSE groups, A-level sociology, an ICT course for parents and three enterprise conferences in the future. It is early days, but it is clear that the school will expand its links with the community through its specialism. As with other elements of the school’s work, the aim is for quality rather than quantity.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

197. **General studies** is taken by all students in Year 12 and most choose to take the A-level in Year 13. The head of sixth form delivers one lesson a week in Year 12 and one a fortnight in Year 13, none of which occurred during the inspection. Results have been consistently above average since 2000, contributing valuable points to students’ totals. Two students achieved marks within the top ten in the country in 2003. The PSHE/citizenship programme complements the general studies course, covering financial planning, the European Union and an entrepreneurship masterclass. Several students are involved in running Young Enterprise ventures. Students achieve extremely well, especially considering how few discrete lessons they have.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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