

INSPECTION REPORT

ST PAUL'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Leicester

LEA area: Leicester City

Unique reference number: 120307

Headteacher: Dr F Doherty

Lead inspector: Mr I Hodgkinson

Dates of inspection: 12th – 15th January 2004

Inspection number: 259240

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,080
School address:	Spencefield Lane Leicester Leicestershire
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Telephone number:	0116 241 4057
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Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Evans
Date of previous inspection:	April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Paul's is a mixed Catholic comprehensive school, and the only Catholic school serving the south and east of Leicester city. It is located in a fairly prosperous suburb on the eastern edge of Leicester, but it recruits students from a wide area (and a very broad range of socio-economic backgrounds), across the city itself, and from a large swathe of eastern Leicestershire. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is broadly average, as is students' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. The school is over-subscribed, and the large majority of students are baptised Catholics, yet it remains of an average size. Its lack of significant growth is mostly down to severe constraints imposed by its site, which it shares with a completely separate independent junior school. Having recently acquired specialist Performing Arts College status, through a joint bid with Leicester's other catholic school, it is due to build new facilities, but is having to build upwards rather than outwards.

The ethnic composition of the school's population has changed substantially since the last inspection. Over a third of students are now from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with eight per cent in 1998. There has been a very large increase in the proportion of students with English as an additional language; 112 students are at an early stage of English acquisition. Thirty-six refugees or asylum seekers are on roll. Three students are of traveller heritage. Nearly 80 students have joined the school from overseas in the past four terms, mostly from the Philippines, Zimbabwe and India. Around ten per cent of sixth-form students are from overseas.

The proportion of students with special educational needs and with statements of need is broadly average. Those students requiring support, beyond that provided by the school itself, have a variety of needs. Most students have moderate or specific learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Two have a hearing and one a visual impairment. Five (including one in the sixth form) have physical disabilities. One is autistic and one has a severe learning difficulty. Four students are in public care.

The school participates in Leicester's Excellence in Cities initiative, with a particular focus on mentoring programmes, widening participation and support for the gifted and talented. It received an Excellence in Mentoring Award in 2003 and, in 1998, gained Investor in People status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	Lead inspector	
9417	Mrs E Owen	Lay inspector	
32362	Mr K Warburton	Team inspector	Mathematics
31174	Mr D Westworth	Team inspector	English
18076	Mr H Dodd	Team inspector	Science
8052	Mr K McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
10053	Ms J Simms	Team inspector	Art and design Business education, sixth form
8503	Mr A Allfree	Team inspector	Design and technology
1994	Ms H Olds	Team inspector	Geography Sociology, sixth form
30005	Mr P Legon	Team inspector	History Special educational needs
16050	Mrs C Orr	Team inspector	French German
8360	Mr F Peacock	Team inspector	Music Performing arts, sixth form
23030	Ms C Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
22196	Ms J MacPhee	Team inspector	English as an additional language
19414	Ms J Flisher	Team inspector	English, sixth form Citizenship
22985	Ms J Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology, sixth form
6138]	Mr K Page	Team inspector	Mathematics, sixth form

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	10
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
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	23
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	27
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	43
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	55

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Paul's is a good, effective school which gives good value for money. It welcomes students from diverse ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds and provides them with education of good quality. They achieve well. The high standard of provision for art and performing arts, especially in the sixth form, offers a very positive reflection of the school's specialist arts college status. Its strong sense of mission creates a very positive ethos for learning.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- There is an excellent range of high quality support, advice and guidance available to students.
- The school's commitment to a number of local and national initiatives, such as the Excellence in Cities programme, is having a very beneficial effect on the learning and personal development of students.
- Standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations are above average and rising strongly.
- Good teaching in the school is promoted by a very good programme of professional development for teachers, who have very good subject knowledge.
- The school is very well led by its senior team, with a clear focus on raising achievement for all students, regardless of background. Managers, however, are not always rigorous enough in identifying and acting to improve weaker aspects of performance. Financial management and controls, in particular, have been weak.
- The quality of provision for physical education is unsatisfactory.
- Students do not use computers enough to help their learning in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and design and technology.
- The school's site and premises impose significant constraints on its development and progress.

The school has made good improvement since its last inspection in 1998, when standards and the quality of education were good. The school's results have continued to improve. Good progress has been made against most of the key issues raised at the last inspection, especially in the general quality and consistency of teaching. Assessment has improved overall, but still shows weaknesses in many subjects in Years 7 to 9. There is still a need to increase the use of computers in subjects. Monitoring systems are now thorough, but do not always sharply identify weaknesses.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Standards achieved overall are above average. Students achieve well by the end of Year 9; their results in national tests are above average and have risen at a faster rate than the national trend. Achievement is also good by the end of Year 11. GCSE results are above the national average and have risen strongly and consistently over the last four years, although there have been variations in standards by subject. Attainment at AS and A-level, overall, is in line with the national average and improving steadily. A-level results represent good achievement for the students who stay on into, or who join, this sixth form. The school's comprehensive mentoring and support programmes, along with an increasing awareness of students' learning needs among teachers, ensure that, in all years, students for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs make good progress. Gifted and talented students achieve very well, especially in science, design and technology and drama.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. The school makes strong provision to raise students' awareness of moral and social issues. Attendance is satisfactory and in line with the national average. Punctuality is satisfactory. Students' attitudes are generally good. Behaviour overall is satisfactory; in lessons it is good and often very good. Peer mentoring schemes are very effective in developing students' personal qualities.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Students learn well because they get **good teaching** in lessons, and very good care, guidance and support from the staff. Teachers have very good subject expertise and use this to offer well-planned and engaging lessons. Teachers use assessment information better from Year 10 onwards; many subjects do not make good enough use of attainment targets in Years 7 to 9 to show students how to improve. Assessment is very thorough and helpful in the sixth form. The curriculum is good, with particularly good provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE), and careers education and guidance. The school is taking positive action to counter low attainment and higher exclusion rates for black Caribbean students. The curriculum is supported well by good staffing and very good working links with other schools and colleges, but is considerably restricted by the quality of accommodation and ICT resources.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is very good. Good governance supports and monitors the work of the school, although there have been shortcomings in the degree of financial controls exercised in the past. Management is good overall, with strengths in the management of student performance.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students are mostly very strongly supportive of the work of the school; they feel in particular that the teaching is good and the school is well run. Students in Years 7 to 10 were mostly concerned with general behaviour; inspectors found that behaviour was good in lessons but less so outside the classroom. Inspectors agree with sixth-formers who feel strongly that they are not given enough opportunities to participate in extra-curricular games and other activities.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise standards in physical education;
- sharpen monitoring procedures so that weaknesses in performance are more specifically identified by managers, to enable more effective planning for improvement;
- improve the use of computers to help learning in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and design and technology;
- carry through procedures which have been set in place to tighten financial controls;
- take opportunities to improve the school's site and premises;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that the school prospectus and annual reports to parents meet requirements.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good, cost-effective sixth form, and its students achieve well overall. Achievement is good or better in all subjects at A-level, but is less strong in some subjects at AS level. The sixth form has made good improvement since the last inspection in maintaining its standards and making improvement in facilities for sixth-formers.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The quality of provision is good in most subjects, and very good in art and design, performing arts and sociology.
- Students receive advice, guidance and support of a high quality. Regular progress reviews for students are very thorough and offer a clear indication to students about how they can improve.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; lessons are stimulating, challenging and employ a range of methods; assessment is mostly very thorough and helpful.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The sixth form benefits from good leadership, which promotes high standards, and has helped develop facilities for sixth-formers to a significant degree.
- There are insufficient extra-curricular and enrichment activities for sixth-formers.
- The provision of vocational education is narrow, and it is unsatisfactory to compel those following GCSE resit programmes to take the one vocational course on offer.

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; those inspected in detail are highlighted in **bold**.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good in English , where teaching, learning and achievement are good and based firmly on teachers' very good subject competence. Very good teaching was seen in French, where A-level results have been consistently above average.
Mathematics	Satisfactory in mathematics , where achievement is good at A-level and satisfactory over time at AS level. Teachers have high expectations, but do not track students' progress in enough detail.
Science	Good in biology , where A-level results have been well above the national averages, and teachers' expectations are very high. Physics is taught by specialists with excellent subject knowledge, and results are consistently above average.
Information and communication technology	Good in ICT , where results improved very significantly in 2003 and students benefit from good, clear assessment of work.
Humanities	Very good in sociology where high quality teaching inspires students to achieve very well. Geography A-level results were strong in 2003; teaching is good. Very good teaching was seen in history, where results show very good achievement. One good and one very good psychology lesson were seen.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	In design and technology, good teaching helps students develop effective skills in analysis, evaluation and presentation.

Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design , where very good teaching harnesses students' personal interests and enthusiasm and promotes achievement above expectations. Very good in performing arts , where outstanding subject leadership supports excellent teaching and very high standards. Good teaching was seen in music, where student numbers have been small and attainment average.
Business	Satisfactory in GNVQ business , where some students achieve well but where teachers have to work hard to quash the negative attitudes felt by many students who do not want to take the course. In economics, there is good, specialist teaching and A-level results show good achievement.
General education	Good overall. Students benefit from a personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme of a high quality, and receive good support, advice and guidance on careers. Provision for extra-curricular activities is a weakness.

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

Students receive advice, guidance and support of a high quality. Before joining the sixth form, students are given comprehensive advice on the full range of post-16 options available locally. Those who remain have made a very considered choice and are fully aware of alternatives. While in the sixth form, students benefit from very close monitoring of their progress through very thorough eight-weekly progress reviews. These reviews enable subject teachers and tutors to develop a very good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of each student and how to deploy support. Students who join the school from overseas get good support in designing programmes and periods of study to suit their needs. Tutors have close and regular contact with their students and the support they offer is enhanced by a very good PSHE programme. Students receive good quality guidance for choices of careers and higher education, and there are many opportunities to visit colleges and universities within subjects and for investigating careers in key professions.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is well led with a clear vision about improvements which are needed. The school has undertaken surveys of Year 11 leavers to find out why they choose alternative post-16 provision, to determine how the school can improve its sixth form, and has responded by investing in significant recent improvements to sixth-form social and private study facilities which are now satisfactory. Additionally, the school has maintained a good focus on raising achievement in the sixth form through the analysis of subjects' A-level success in relation to students' GCSE results, and through the close monitoring of individual students' progress through the progress reviews.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have very positive views of the sixth form overall, and feel in particular that the teaching is very good and the sixth form well run. Discussions with students and inspection evidence indicated that the quality of support and guidance available to students was high. Inspectors agree with students that there are insufficient extra-curricular and enrichment activities for sixth-formers, particularly in sport and games.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards achieved overall are above average. Results in national tests and examinations, at all stages, have improved consistently over the last four years. The school's comprehensive mentoring and support programmes, along with an increasing awareness of students' learning needs among teachers, ensure that, in all years, students for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs make good progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in Year 9 national tests are above average and have risen at a faster rate than the national trend.
- GCSE results are above the national average and have risen strongly and consistently over the last four years, although there has been considerable variation in performance by subject.
- Students achieve very well in science between Years 7 to 11 and attainment is well above average.
- Students achieve high standards in art and design, performing arts and sociology in the sixth form.
- Achievement in physical education is unsatisfactory in all years, especially that of girls.
- In some subjects, AS results were weak in 2003 because a significant proportion of students did not reach the pass standard.
- Gifted and talented students make very good progress overall.

Commentary

1. Students' attainment, when they enter the school in Year 7 is broadly average but with fewer than average showing the higher levels of attainment. In science, attainment on entry is below average. In national tests at the end of Year 9, results have been consistently above average overall, and were well above average in 2002. This indicates good achievement across Years 7 to 9. The table below shows that, in science in particular and in English before 2003, results have been strong when compared with national averages.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.6 (36.2)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	35.9 (35.8)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	36.1 (35.3)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 172 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. There has been strong improvement in science, and consistent improvement in mathematics Year 9 test results, over the last five years. While English results fell in 2003, they were well above average in 2001 and 2002. Overall national Year 9 test results are above the national average for all schools and for schools with students of similar prior attainment on entry. The school strongly exceeded its 2003 target for the tests in science, exceeded that in mathematics and narrowly missed the target in English. Targets for performance in ICT were not reached, mainly as a result of historic weaknesses in provision for the subject, which have now largely been addressed.

3. By Year 9, the school has been largely successful in addressing the boys' underachievement noted in the last inspection report. A similar improvement was evident for Year 11 students in GCSE results in 2003. In terms of average points scores, boys have closed the gap on girls in English Year 9 tests to less than the national difference, and do better than girls in mathematics and science beyond the difference found nationally. Overall, over the last three years, boys' Year 9 test results have been better than girls', in contrast to the national picture. In modern foreign languages, ICT, history and geography, boys achieve less well than girls by Year 9.
4. Currently in subjects by Year 9, students achieve very well in science and ICT as a result of very good teaching. Students achieve well in English, mathematics, history, design and technology and music. Achievement is satisfactory in modern foreign languages, where students get good teaching, but their progress is constrained by much lower teaching time than usual. Achievement is also satisfactory in geography, art and design and citizenship. There is some excellent teaching in art and design, but staffing difficulties have disrupted the progress of many students' learning. Achievement is unsatisfactory in physical education, especially for girls, as a result of unsatisfactory teaching and poor subject leadership.
5. The school is rightly pleased with the growth in the proportion of its students getting five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C over time, a proportion which has risen successively from 50 per cent in 2000 to 60 per cent by 2003. Overall, results measured by students' average points scores have risen in line with the national trend over five years and rather more quickly over the last four. As a consequence, GCSE results have moved from average to above the national average for all schools on most measures.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	60 (54)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	89 (89)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	37.2 (34.7)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 207 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. In relation to schools whose students attained similar scores in Year 9 tests, results improved markedly in 2003. For students attaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C, the school's results are now above the average for similar schools, and average for GCSE points scored, having been well below average on both measures in 2000 and 2001 and below average in 2002. As a result, the school was very close to meeting its 2003 GCSE targets. The 'value added' of students' results, from Year 9 tests to GCSE, was in line with national averages.
7. There has been some considerable variation in GCSE performance by subject. Results in design and technology, drama and German have been very strong; in 2003, students in design and technology, and especially drama, achieved a high proportion of A* grades. Science results improved dramatically in 2003 after some decline and are well above average. Mathematics, geography and art and design results have been weak in relation to national averages and to other subjects in the school; inspection evidence, however, would indicate that standards are now average by Year 11 in all of these subjects.
8. By Year 11, students achieve very well in science and design and technology. Assessment in design and technology in Years 10 and 11 is particularly effective and helps to raise standards considerably. Achievement is good in English, modern foreign languages, mathematics, ICT,

history and music. Students' achievement is satisfactory in geography, art and design and citizenship. In physical education, students, particularly girls, underachieve by Year 11.

9. Students with special educational needs make good progress overall. They are accurately identified, often by feeder schools, and their needs are met to a considerable extent by individual education plans, which are subject specific in most curriculum areas. The students who achieve the best standards are those supported by teachers or learning support assistants and often work together in small groups in lessons so that they can easily access this support. Many make substantial progress but the special needs register has become static and they do not lose their statements of special needs. The head of learning support, in post for only a short time, is seeking to rectify this situation and to move students on and off the register as their needs dictate.
10. The school receives below average numbers of gifted and talented students but achieves very good results from them. They are making very good progress in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, ICT and, in the sixth form, English. Progress is good in all other subjects, except in physical education, where it is satisfactory. The standards attained by these students are higher than those of their peers. They are carefully identified upon entry to the school, by their performance in national tests and by nominations from subject departments. Some departments provide them with individual education plans, which include demanding targets, and this practice is gradually spreading across the school. The gifted and talented programme, which is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, has been in operation for too short a time to have had a significant impact on results, but the school has a very good base on which to construct its plans for even higher standards to be attained by the students involved in it.
11. Although most of the ethnic groups of students are too small to allow any valid statistical analysis, attainment in Year 9 tests and GCSE results does vary by ethnicity. In 2003, results at both Year 9 and Year 11 were significantly higher for Asian Indian students than for other groups. GCSE results for Black African students were also higher than their white counterparts. Results of Black Caribbean students were, however, well below those of other groups in Year 9 tests and GCSE results. The school is aware of the need to raise attainment of Black Caribbean students and this is a priority in the learning mentors' development plan which forms part of the whole-school development plan. Inspection evidence in lessons indicated that, overall, students from all groups were making at least satisfactory, and mostly good, progress. Progress made by students for whom English is an additional language, including new arrivals, is good overall. Mentoring support, and good awareness by teachers of the background of students, helps to secure good achievement.

Sixth Form

12. In the sixth form, achievement is good. Overall, the school's A-level results exceed those predicted on the basis of students' GCSE results on entry. Chemistry, economics, French, German, mathematics and performing arts are consistently strong performers in terms of progress from GCSE to A-level. Overall attainment at AS and A-level was in line with the national averages in 2002 and 2003. The performance of boys increased significantly from 2001 to 2002, so that, in 2002, girls' and boys' performance was in line with the national average.

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	93.1 (88.3)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	35.6 (34.8)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	239.7 (249.6)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 66 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

13. As is the case nationally, pass rates are better at A-level than at AS level. In mathematics, biology, ICT, economics and geography, AS results were weak in 2003 because a significant proportion of students did not get an AS grade. Rates of completion for GNVQ business are low, because many who start the course do so only so that they can stay on to take GCSE resits. The poor attitudes that this arrangement promotes constrains the learning of those who really wish to succeed on the course.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is **satisfactory** and in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is slightly above average. Punctuality is **satisfactory**. Students' attitudes are generally good and behaviour overall is **satisfactory**. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' confidence and self-esteem are very well promoted by the support systems in place.
- The increased numbers of minority ethnic students are very effectively integrated into the school community.
- There is a much-improved awareness of other faiths and cultures.
- Systems to follow up and monitor poor attendance and punctuality have improved.
- While spiritual development is good overall, there are some missed opportunities to develop students' spirituality. The school makes strong provision, however, to raise students' awareness of moral and social issues.
- While generally good in lessons, students' behaviour is sometimes unsatisfactory outside the classroom.

Commentary

14. Good relationships and students' confidence are very effectively promoted throughout the school, not least by the network of support systems, with strong friendships between students of differing ethnic backgrounds, and a school ethos where racism is not tolerated. Most students enjoy school and their lessons and feel safe in school. A few of the younger students have experienced some bullying but most students are confident that the school will deal quickly with any perpetrators.
15. Improved systems to monitor attendance have been introduced, including those for the sixth form which encourage the most effective use of students' free time. Most form tutors follow up lateness with the students concerned, although a significant number of students still arrives late to school.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.0
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	2.1
National data	1.1

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

16. Behaviour is usually good in lessons, and often very good, but in some, mostly in Years 8 and 9, expectations of students' behaviour were inconsistent with the high standards insisted upon by most teachers. At break and lunchtimes some poor behaviour was seen, partly associated with new lunchtime arrangements introduced in the week of the inspection. There were no permanent exclusions in the school. Fixed-period exclusions are average for a school of this size, and the school only excludes for very good reasons. The figures below indicate a disproportionately high rate of exclusion for Black Caribbean students. The school is aware of the difficulties faced by this group in terms of attitudes and achievement and has set in place mentoring schemes of good quality to address the issue.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	714	38	0
White – Irish	45	5	0
White – any other White background	45	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	43	7	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	24	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	18	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	59	1	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	33	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	27	8	0
Black or Black British – African	36	1	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	9	1	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	6	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

17. In lessons where students have support, the attitudes of those with special educational needs are very good. However, in modern foreign languages and mathematics, there were instances of students with behavioural difficulties disrupting the learning of the group. Generally, all students with additional needs are integrated well into classes and have a good relationship with their peers. They are appreciative of the care and support they receive from the adults who support them. Gifted and talented students are enthusiastic about their work, both in

lessons and in the programme of activities devised for them. In ICT, some of them assist teachers.

18. Students' sense of being part of a community is well developed and they willingly take on responsibility across the school and in the wider community. This includes enthusiastic participation in the peer mentoring schemes where older students, including sixth-formers, support their younger peers. Whilst students' spiritual development is good overall, there were occasions during the inspection, in form tutor periods and in assemblies, where opportunities to foster spiritual development were missed. Students' knowledge about different faiths and cultures is being promoted through a number of curriculum areas including religious education, art and design, dance and drama, music and English. Students confront and debate difficult moral and social issues with maturity in lessons such as religious education and PSHE.

Sixth Form

19. Sixth-formers have very good attitudes to learning. These positive attitudes are promoted by the close support and guidance they receive through their teachers and tutors. On joining the sixth form, students enter into a learning agreement which involves a commitment to voluntary service. Partly as a result of this, students are very active in charitable activities, and in supporting younger students through peer mentoring schemes. The head of sixth form monitors and regulates attendance very closely, and good attendance in the sixth form promotes good achievement. Relationships between students in the sixth form are mostly good, but sixth-formers do not have enough opportunities to develop these positive relationships through extra-curricular activities, especially in sport. Opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills are constrained by a lack of regular formal meetings of a fully constituted sixth-form committee or council.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. Students are taught well by specialists, and they **learn well** as a result. **A good, well-balanced curriculum** is organised with flexibility to meet individual needs and enhanced by a generally **good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities**. Students have access to **very good advice, support and guidance** and there is **very good care for students' welfare and safety**.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students are well taught; they learn well and with enthusiasm. The **assessment** of students' work and progress is **satisfactory** overall, and mostly very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use to plan engaging lessons for students.
- Teachers offer students much encouragement, and give freely of their time to provide help and support out of lessons.
- Students do not use computers enough to help their learning in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and design and technology.
- Assessment of students' work and progress is very effective in the sixth form and good in Years 10 and 11, but is less effective in Years 7 to 9 in showing students how to improve.

Commentary

20. Teachers' very good subject knowledge is a key strength which underpins the good quality of education in the school. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in particular, teachers couple this subject expertise with very effective lesson structures which offer particularly engaging approaches. These lessons feature energising starter activities, clear specification of objectives for the lesson, interesting activities and effective reviews of progress against lesson objectives at the end. As a consequence, students learn well. They apply themselves well to the variety of tasks and learn to work independently and in groups in a variety of situations. This effective methodology, linked to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, is supporting the rapid improvement in results in Year 9 tests and in later years. Students' quality of learning, and their ability to develop independent learning skills, is constrained in a number of subjects by a lack of access to good computer equipment and software. Learning, however, is supported by students' generally good literacy skills and numerical competence. Learning is also strongly supported by teachers' willingness to give up time outside lessons to offer individual help, support sessions, subject clubs and other enrichment activities.
21. Teaching and learning are good overall in most subjects. They are very good in science and ICT in Years 7 to 11, mainly because of very effective teaching methods which enable students to learn at a very good pace. Assessment strategies are also particularly effective in these subjects, in monitoring students' progress and showing them how to improve, and in helping teachers plan to meet the needs of individual students. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in geography and citizenship. They are unsatisfactory in physical education, where lessons are too often slow to start and lacking in pace, little use is made of assessment information to help teachers plan to meet the needs of students, so tasks are not suitably challenging for students.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 166 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (5%)	41 (25%)	69 (42%)	36 (22%)	9 (5%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

22. Teaching is good overall across Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11, but most of the weaker teaching occurs in the earlier years. Apart from those in physical education, the few unsatisfactory lessons were mostly as a result of poor behaviour in lessons not being well managed by the teacher. The school has clear procedures for controlling poor behaviour in the classroom but, in a few instances, teachers do not implement those procedures with enough speed or rigour.
23. Assessment is used well in Years 10 and 11 to set targets for students and to monitor their progress against those targets. This is the case for some subjects in Years 7 to 9, and where assessment is particularly good in these years, as in science and ICT, it helps students make very good progress. The use of attainment targets across subjects in Years 7 to 9 is not, however, well established. As a result, students in Years 7 to 9 are not as clear as those in later years about how to improve their performance, and their teachers are not as clear about how to plan lessons to help students improve.
24. Nearly all teachers display good awareness of the special educational needs of students and there is much well-designed work to help these students make progress. Teaching assistants generally provide good and flexible support; they will help others in the class when appropriate. However, liaison between class teachers and support staff is inconsistent and there is little evidence of the content of the lessons being more precisely adapted in advance by support staff. Students with additional needs receive helpful feedback, both orally and in writing, from nearly all of their teachers. In many subjects, teachers provide extension work for gifted and

talented students. The quality of learning of gifted and talented students, seen in lessons in both the main school and the sixth form, was very good.

25. The full extent of the different needs of the newly arrived students from overseas with English as an additional language is becoming more and more apparent to teaching and support staff. The ethos and culture of the school is welcoming to these students. This is evident in that the majority of classrooms have a positive environment where students feel confident to contribute to lessons. When interviewed, students with English as an additional language from a range of years were consistent in saying that teachers and peers were always willing to help them. At present, the assessment of students' language needs is not used consistently in teachers' planning, but more formal assessment procedures now in place should help this process. More thought should now be given to planning explicit language targets to support these students so that they have a better understanding of what they have to do to improve their English. In-class support by teaching assistants for students with English as an additional language takes place in some subjects but is not directly linked to teachers' planning. Enhanced opportunities for speaking and listening were observed in English, mathematics, science and geography lessons; this had a direct impact on students' understanding of the lessons, enabling them to engage in discussion and, therefore, better able to participate.

Sixth form

26. Sixth-formers, like their fellow students in earlier years, benefit from good teaching and willing support by specialist teachers. Sixth-formers benefit particularly, however, from some very detailed marking and assessment of their work, and thorough monitoring of their progress. Students' learning is supported by their generally good communication and number skills, and satisfactory skills in using computers.

The curriculum

The **curriculum** is **good** overall and meets the broad statutory requirements. There is a **good** range of **enrichment activities**. Overall, **staffing, accommodation and resources** are **satisfactory**. The curriculum is supported well by good staffing but is considerably restricted by the unsatisfactory quality of accommodation and ICT resources.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very well co-ordinated PSHE programme effectively supports the care and guidance and the moral and social development of students.
- Lack of access to computers adversely affects learning in many subjects.
- The gifted and talented students are identified and given very effective extra provision through the Excellence in Cities initiative.
- The performing arts college status is already ensuring that a range of enrichment activities and increased resources are adding depth and variety to the students' experiences; extra-curricular opportunities in dance and drama are very good.
- There are some good vocational courses for a minority of selected students in Years 10 and 11, but few vocational options are available to all students.
- There is not enough time for students to cover the modern foreign language programme of study in Years 7, 8 and 9 in sufficient depth.
- The students are given very good advice for future education and there is a good work experience programme, as well as good links with universities for sixth-form students.

Commentary

27. The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall. Drama is taught in addition to the normal subjects and helps to develop students' speaking and listening and social skills. There is good provision for students with special educational needs but too few support staff to meet all of the students' needs. Citizenship is included in the personal and social education programme, but is not planned and monitored effectively enough when taught within other subjects. Whilst ICT meets National Curriculum requirements, there has been too little movement forward in the teaching of these skills in individual subjects. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is of a generally good quality and range. Students choose from a good range of GCSE options but there are at present no vocational courses on offer. In addition, there are some pre-vocational courses for a small number of students who have difficulty coping with a full range of GCSEs. The well co-ordinated pre-vocational courses provide well for the students, raise their self-esteem and confidence, and students' progress is tracked effectively. The management of the curriculum is good and ongoing review establishes where things might be improved. Across all years, provision to support students' literacy skills across many subjects is effective and managed well, but there are fewer opportunities to develop number and computer skills.
28. Students receive full information about the optional subjects, including the views of past students. The careers advice programme is well planned and very effective. Work experience for Year 10 students makes good use of local and international businesses.
29. The school has responded well to the Excellence in Cities initiative and has identified students who are gifted and talented, as well as becoming involved in a wide range of projects such as the 'Aim Higher Road Show'. In many subjects, teachers provide extension work for gifted and talented students. Master classes are held in mathematics where there is provision for early entry for GCSE. Specific revision sessions are held for them in science. In ICT, a special GCSE course is open to them. This is taught outside the normal school day. In modern foreign languages, there are opportunities to learn Spanish and Italian in addition to the core languages of French and German. Latin is also offered as an extra-curricular option. In geography, there is a project with the local university in which students from this school and others simulate the management of the economy of a developing country. Popular mentoring schemes provide students with the opportunity to work with professional adults. Year 9 students were involved in a Building Career day which helped to widen their knowledge of some more diverse jobs linked to the building industry. Close links to local colleges and universities give students a good insight into further education and often broaden their horizons.
30. The provision for personal, social and health education is very good and supported well by a range of visiting speakers. It is well planned to cover all the required topics and the quality of teaching, although varied, is carefully monitored, quickly addressing areas for improvement. Citizenship is being taught mainly through this programme. The school has carried out an audit of where citizenship objectives are already being covered in subjects, but it has yet to draw up a clear scheme of work to ensure that all aspects are fully covered.
31. The school has responded well to the newly attained Performing Arts College Status. All subjects have been audited to assess their ability to contribute. The planned programme has been well co-ordinated, ensuring that local primary schools are involved, but it is too early to assess the impact.
32. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good. There are many opportunities for learning additional languages and exploring different cultures. Drama and dance extra-curricular programmes combine well to give many students the opportunity to perform in school productions. There have been trips to other countries, such as Spain and Italy, when students have been able to learn about dances and traditions from other cultures. The Catholic ethos of the school is reflected well in a range of activities, services and charity work. Fieldwork extends students' learning in geography, and there is a good range of visits to theatres and galleries to support learning. There are missed opportunities for extra-curricular or enrichment

activities in some subjects; the range of activities available to the students in music and sport is limited.

33. In Years 7 to 9, students with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum, except for a small number of Year 9 students who continue to be withdrawn from modern foreign languages lessons. In Years 10 and 11, some students with additional needs benefit from the successful ASDAN pre-vocational course and from the work-related learning programme, but there is a lack of other vocational options which might suit their learning styles. Where students are in mixed-ability groups and lessons have a lot of instruction from the teacher, students with special educational needs make less progress.
34. Provision to support students with English as an additional language is satisfactory overall, despite a shortage of resources and specialist staff. A number of newly arrived students with English as an additional language, who come to the school in the middle of an academic year, are put in a class below their chronological age. This helps to support the adjustment to a new school and, for some, to subject areas that they have not experienced before, for example design and technology and PSHE. Literacy progress units in Years 7 to 9 include a number of English language learners. The small, regular group work supports these students who were observed actively participating in the lesson. Resources are limited to bilingual dictionaries for some languages, for example Tagalog and Shona, but students and some teachers make good use of the Internet, particularly sites that offer translation of different languages. There are opportunities, as appropriate, for students to take their heritage language at GCSE level, for example Japanese and Gujarati. A Japanese student is taking AS level Japanese.
35. Through the Excellence in Cities initiative, a mentoring programme aims to improve the academic performance of underachieving groups of students. A range of opportunities exists to support Black Caribbean and African students to engage more fully in school. For example, a mentor from De Montfort University comes for a day a week to support a group of Black Caribbean students. The support varies from in-class support to individual mentoring. Results have shown both improved behaviour and self-esteem. The local education authority (LEA) and school have completed the joint planning of a project aimed at incorporating ICT and science and run by Black Caribbean and African students. The project involves links with the City Learning Centre and the Space Centre, its aim is to create a science resource for Years 7 to 9.
36. Staffing is very good overall and meets the needs of the curriculum well. The well-qualified specialist teachers know their students well and teach in a caring and supportive manner. This results in students achieving well in almost all subjects. Support staff also make a very good contribution to students' learning. In design and technology, ICT and science, technicians contribute well to the smooth running of the departments. At present, there are only two science technicians and this is insufficient for a large department which offers AS and A-level courses in biology, physics and chemistry. The librarian and careers adviser provide knowledgeable support for study and careers choice. The administrative staff efficiently ensure the smooth running of the school day.
37. The quality and quantity of accommodation is unsatisfactory. The building was originally a convent school and the accommodation is far too small for the present population. Although the classrooms are cramped, and the work space for staff restricted, teachers try hard to ensure that this does not affect standards. Teaching of physical education is severely affected by the lack of a gym and by the shared outdoor facilities. Much of the building looks shabby and does not encourage pride in its appearance. Because the corridors are narrow, and sometimes dark, there is the opportunity for students to misbehave. There are many steps and stairs around the building that make it impossible for students and adults with mobility difficulties to use the school. Accommodation for learning support is basic, with the base of the head of learning support separated from the main teaching room for withdrawal groups. There is no separate accommodation for individual support of students with emotional and behavioural needs. An accessibility plan for disabled students has yet to be devised.

38. The overall levels and quality of learning resources are satisfactory but in no departments are they described as better than satisfactory. There have been some recent improvements in the learning resource centre (library) which has been re-equipped with up-to-date computers and LCD monitors to make best use of the space available. There has been an increase in the book stock including 'books for boys', to encourage reading. However, the book stock, is significantly below average for a school of this size. The level of funding for the library has remained static for many years resulting in a significant fall in real terms. There are further ambitious plans for this area but much depends upon gaining external funding. The level of ICT resources has shown a good improvement since the last inspection but is still below average for a school of this size. There are two interactive whiteboards, which are used well, but the curriculum would benefit from greater availability. The use of ICT across the curriculum, which was a key issue in the last inspection report, remains underdeveloped in many of subjects because of limited access to computers and the lack of specialist ICT resources in design and technology and science.

Sixth form

39. The curriculum provided is good overall. The range of AS and A-level courses on offer to students in the sixth form is wide. However, as with students in Years 10 to 11, there is a narrow range of vocational subjects available to students. Business studies is compulsory for all students who return to the sixth form to improve their GCSE grades. This is not always popular and many students drop the course once their GCSE examinations have been retaken. Sociology is a very popular course, well organised and makes a particularly positive input into the students' social and moral education. In art and design, the students experience a wide range of media from wood carving to working with film. There are very few opportunities for sport in the sixth form.
40. The students receive good quality guidance for their choice of courses and further education. There are many opportunities to visit colleges and universities within subjects and for learning about general student life issues.
41. The enrichment programmes and extra-curricular activities provided to sixth-form students in most subjects are limited. However, they are very good with respect to performing arts. Sixth-form students are involved in organising some of their own activities and this helps to promote their independence and organisational skills both in school and in the local community. There are many trips to other countries, galleries and the theatre and students value the commitment of the staff.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements for students' care, welfare, health and safety are **very good**. Provision of support, advice and guidance, based on monitoring, is **very good**. Involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views, is **good** in the sixth form and **satisfactory** throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range of support for students is excellent and of a high quality.
- Monitoring of students is good and the support, based on assessment, is a key factor in improving achievement.
- Thorough arrangements are in place for child protection, first aid and health and safety.
- The school council is not as effective as it has been in enabling students to have influence in school.
- Good links with primary schools ensure effective transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and very good induction into the school.

Commentary

42. There is a huge network of support for students, which is well co-ordinated and meets a wide range of students' needs. It includes the deputy headteachers and the pastoral team led by year heads; the mentoring systems, which include full-time student and external mentors; the school Chaplain, who plays a key role in school; the school counsellor; and the first-aid nurse. It also involves external input from the school nurse, the educational welfare officer and externally run courses in personal development. This results in students having very good and trusting relationships with a number of adults in school to whom they can turn.
43. Monitoring of students' behaviour and personal development, the assessment of students' attainment by most departments (especially from Year 10 onwards), and the identification of weaker areas where support is needed, are key factors in raising students' achievement. Close monitoring in the sixth form picks up any problems at an early stage. Independent careers advice involving the assistant headteacher, external mentors and Connexions is available to students.
44. The deputy headteacher with a responsibility for Years 7 to 9 plays the leading role in child protection issues, regularly raises awareness amongst staff and has good links with external agencies. Health and safety arrangements are based on regular risk assessment and effective liaison with the governing body. There are systems in place to ensure safe use of the Internet, and parents' consent is sought.
45. Across all student year groups there is some loss of confidence in their ability to effect change through the school council. They all raised concern about the state of most of the toilets in school, which they find unacceptable, and the apparent lack of response to these concerns. The school has recognised the need to revitalise the school council and more regular meetings have commenced.
46. Regular visits, open days, taster days and student helpers at the start of term help Year 7 students to settle quickly into school life.
47. The care shown to students with special educational needs is highly effective. A room is available for them at lunchtime and those with physical or medical problems receive much appreciated attention from the school nurse. The Connexions Service offers constructive advice to older students with statements of additional needs during their annual reviews. All of the support teachers and assistants attached to individual students have good relationships with them and are prepared to go to much trouble to help them. If lessons are missed through students' attendance at the college of further education or because they are ill, the support staff frequently copy the work into their books so that they do not have gaps in their understanding. There is a trained counsellor for supporting some of the most vulnerable students. Gifted and talented students are carefully monitored by the two members of staff with whole-school responsibility for them, in addition to the advice and support which they receive from their teachers in most subjects.

48. During the inspection a member of the senior management team said, 'The diversity of students enriches the school, and they are not looked at as a problem but as an enhancement'. This exemplifies the attitude that the school takes to the recent change in the ethnicity of the student body. The school cares about its students down to the individual. The recently refined induction process for newly-arrived students involves a series of well-timed interviews with key staff and support from other students through a peer buddy system. This system is beginning to provide teachers with useful information about the background of students. The lead learning mentor plays an active and central role in the induction and follow-up support of newly-arrived students. She is very sensitive to their needs, has been pivotal in the care, support and guidance of this group of students and has made a difference to the way they perceive their new school.

Sixth form

49. Students receive advice, guidance and support of a high quality. Before joining the sixth form, students are given comprehensive advice on the full range of post-16 options available locally. Those who remain have made a very considered choice and are fully aware of alternatives. While in the sixth form, students benefit from very close monitoring of their progress through very thorough eight-weekly progress reviews. These reviews enable subject teachers and tutors to develop a very good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of each student and how to deploy support. Students who join the school from overseas get good support in designing programmes and periods of study to suit their needs. Tutors have close and regular contact with their tutees, and the support they offer is enhanced by a very good PSHE programme. Students receive good quality guidance for choices of careers and higher education, and there are many opportunities to visit colleges and universities within subjects and for investigating careers in key professions.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Partnership with parents and the community is good. Partnership with other schools and colleges is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some effective curriculum links are developing as part of the arts college programme and the sports co-ordinators' programme.
- Very good links are established with primary schools, other secondary schools and colleges.
- Parents receive good information, particularly when students start school.
- There are strong parish links, and community/business links through work experience and mentoring.
- The governors' annual report and school prospectus do not meet all requirements.

Commentary

50. A good start has been made to establish curriculum links with a number of primary schools in connection with the arts college programme, which has involved planning between subject co-ordinators, and some extra-curricular opportunities for primary students. The sports co-ordinator programme has also established links and broader opportunities for students in physical education.
51. The school works closely with a considerable number of Catholic feeder primary schools to ensure very effective transfer of information about students before they arrive in secondary school. There are also very good links with the local university, the language college and local further education college to support and enhance the curriculum opportunities and resources available to students. The successful arts college bid was a joint one with the other Catholic secondary school in the city.

52. Parents receive good information prior to, and as their children start school, including advice on how to support their learning. The revamped newsletter includes a wide range of information about school life. There is a well-planned system of reports and open evenings for parents, which ensures early feedback for Years 7 and 11 students. If problems arise, there is effective contact with parents, often directly from subject teachers. For any students whose behaviour is being monitored there is regular contact with parents. The chaplain makes contacts with parents of students with English as an additional language through home visits, when appropriate.
53. The head of learning support has very good contacts with parents whom she arranges to see at parents' evenings. Annual reviews are conducted very well with ample opportunity for parents to comment. The school's links with the educational psychology service and other external agencies are good.
54. A number of external mentors are recruited each year who work regularly with students, often those whom they know through the work experience programme. There are a number of links with the wider catholic community, including fund-raising and charity work, and participation in an annual justice and peace day for Year 9 students. Some links are being established with the immediate community, including involvement in a local litter campaign. These activities have a very positive impact on the personal development of the students who participate.
55. The governors' annual report does not include any national comparators when giving Year 9 national test and GCSE results, and its information on the school's budget lacks clarity. The school prospectus gives no information on test results and no information on attendance.

Sixth Form

56. As with their fellow students in Years 7 to 11, community links are used well to promote students' learning and personal development. There are particularly good opportunities provided through links with colleges, universities and employers' organisations for students to develop awareness of careers options. Links with employers effectively support the learning of those on the business course. Students' work with charitable organisations raises their awareness of moral and social issues and develops their personal responsibility.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher and senior team give the school **very good leadership** and direction, so that, despite a rapid change in the background of the school's students and severe constraints in terms of accommodation and resources, the school has remained focused on its mission and on raising achievement. **Leadership of other key staff, and the management of the school, are good. Governance overall is good;** the governors contribute actively to shaping the direction of the school and have a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, but financial scrutiny was weak for a period of time.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is led very well by the headteacher and senior management team.
- The school's clear mission statement permeates all of its work, and creates a very positive ethos for learning.
- Leadership and management of science and performing arts are outstanding.
- Leadership and management of physical education is poor.
- Managers are not always rigorous enough in identifying and acting to improve weaker aspects of performance, and financial management and controls in particular have been weak.
- The school's programme for the professional development of teachers is very effective.

Commentary

57. School governance is good. The governing body promotes a very clear vision for the school and governors support managers and staff very strongly in shaping the school's future direction. The clear mission statement reinforces the catholic nature of provision very effectively and school life is underpinned by commitment to this. Governors ensure that most statutory duties are fulfilled, but information given to parents in the annual report on the school's finances is not clear enough. Governors generally understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school well because they have strong links with departments. The financial situation, discussed below, is an example where governors have not challenged senior managers sufficiently but, in other matters, the governing body challenges decisions satisfactorily and supports school management well.
58. Leadership of the school by the headteacher and senior team is very good. The new headteacher, in post for just over a term, projects a very clear sense of purpose and promotes high aspirations for students' achievement. This supports similar ambitions of the governing body and most staff. Governors and other members of the senior management team greatly value the positive changes already perceived in the school since the headteacher's recent arrival. The headteacher has blended successfully into a very cohesive senior management team, extending and strengthening existing bonds and commitments.
59. Leadership by middle managers, including heads of subject, pastoral heads and others, is good. The leadership group's new 'networking' style of management is regarded as very supportive by department and pastoral heads and represents a good approach to ensuring that all departments match the standards of the best. Science and performing arts' leadership and management are outstanding and provide very good role models for weaker departments. Year groups and most other pastoral functions are managed well.
60. Strategic planning is good, with a focus on raising achievement. The constraints of accommodation and some other resources are managed well, and the school has realistic long-term plans to try to overcome these. Meanwhile, the leadership group provides very good motivation and influence on staff through shorter-term strategies to help them manage these nuisances. Smaller class groups in arts carousel lessons, for example, are helping staff greatly in these areas.
61. The school's self-evaluation is good. In all but a few examples, department management has been strengthened effectively, with planned training about to occur for newer, or less effective, managers. This has arisen through the results of evaluation and monitoring. Senior managers and most departments review performance effectively, using data available to target improvements required. However, weaknesses are not always identified clearly enough to allow improvement plans to be targeted precisely. Self-evaluation is good overall, but some departments are weaker in this regard because standards expected are not fully understood. Teaching is managed well by most departments, with monitoring occurring regularly, resulting in very good support and development for staff. In physical education, where leadership is poor and such monitoring is unsatisfactory, it is because of weak understanding of the curriculum and standards.
62. The performance management of teachers is well established with all staff being observed at least once per year, with relevant and negotiated targets being set. The school provides very good access, both in-house and external, to professional development opportunities for all its staff. It supports teachers who are new to the school very effectively. In addition, it gives newly qualified teachers appropriate non-contact time and monitoring to enable them to make a successful start to their teaching career. The school has a long history of very effective involvement in the initial training of teachers. It has close links with several nearby teacher training institutions and is a 'partnership promotion school' for the University of Leicester. The school is also currently training two teachers on the Graduate Training Programme. Good procedures are in place for the recruitment, retention and deployment of staff.

63. The learning support department is very well led. In a few months, the head of learning support has raised the profile of her department, and therefore improved the teaching and learning of her students. Her personal commitment to them is exemplary. She receives excellent support from the member of the governing body who is linked with her department. There is regular liaison with subject departments through the teachers designated to link with learning support. A very good action plan has been produced by the head of learning support, the link governor and LEA adviser. It addresses most of the outstanding issues, but awaits implementation. In the current school improvement plan learning support barely features. The school has not yet clarified the relationship between learning support and support for those students with English as an additional language, whose numbers have considerably increased recently. The head of learning support is not sufficiently involved in managing support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are mainly the responsibility of the pastoral heads and the mentoring team. There is an external learning support unit to which pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties can be referred by the school, but there are currently no internal facilities to allow these pupils to be withdrawn from class for specialist support.
64. The co-ordinator for gifted and talented students leads the gifted and talented programme very well. A comprehensive action plan has been produced. There is very good support from the senior management team through the assistant headteacher with responsibility for the Excellence in Cities initiative. All subject departments have a teacher who has responsibility for gifted and talented students. They meet regularly with the co-ordinator. The whole-school management of this programme is very good.
65. St Paul's is actively responding to the rapid increase in the number of new arrivals from overseas with English as an additional language. Structures are being put into place, for example a member of the senior management team has assumed responsibility for this area of teaching and learning. Funding has enabled support for half a day from a teacher and two days support from the lead learning mentor. Although helpful and a start, the school knows that this is insufficient time to get to grips with the issues and is looking further at ways to enhance support. The very low levels of funding received for these students so far in no way reflects the scale of their need. Although heads of department report results yearly to the headteacher on the basis of ethnicity, there is not a rigorous enough system of target-setting and tracking for learners with English as an additional language across the whole school.

Financial information

66. Detailed and precise financial information for the last financial year is hard to come by, partly because of problems caused by changes to accounting and monitoring systems and procedures. During that time, the school moved from a healthy financial surplus into a deficit. This year's financial settlement has caused the projected deficit to rise to £256,180. The school has recognised deficiencies in its systems, and moved to overcome the problems through the appointment of a strategic business manager and an experienced finance officer. These officers have set out to enhance financial control procedures and actively seek to raise additional funding where possible.
67. From figures available, expenditure per student is below average. The school spends a high proportion of its income on teachers and education support staff and a very low proportion on learning. This strategy allows the school to benefit from an experienced and well-qualified staff and, through its own resources, provide good support to individuals and groups of students. It does, however, lead to some learning resource shortages, particularly in ICT facilities.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,919,028	Balance from previous year	100,203

Total expenditure	2,945,965
Expenditure per student	2,805

Balance carried forward to the next	-26,937
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68. There is some lack of clarity in the use of funds allocated for students with special educational needs. At present, some funding for students with special educational needs is spent on students with English as an additional language, some of whom are wrongly designated as having special educational needs.
69. The school ensures good achievement and good personal development of students of diverse backgrounds. When set against below average costs of provision, the school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

70. The sixth form is well led with a clear vision about improvements which are needed. The school has undertaken surveys of Year 11 leavers to find out why they choose alternative post-16 provision to determine how the school can improve its sixth form, and has responded by investing in significant recent improvements to sixth-form social and private study facilities, which are now satisfactory. Additionally, the school has maintained a good focus on raising achievement in the sixth form through the analysis of subjects' A-level success in relation to students' GCSE results, and through the close monitoring of individual students' progress through the progress reviews. The sixth form is cost-effective; it takes no subsidy from the main school, offers a generally good curriculum and its students achieve well.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and sometimes very good across all years; teachers have high expectations of students and all are entered for both GCSE English and English literature.
- The subject is well led and managed, and committed to improvement.
- Support for students by learning support assistants or teacher intervention is effective, but materials are not always designed to cater for the differing levels of attainment within mixed-ability groups.
- There are some weaknesses in writing, particularly amongst boys, in Years 7 to 9 with some problems persisting in Years 10 and 11.
- The department provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

Commentary

71. After strong performances in 2001 and 2002, students' overall performance in the 2003 Year 9 national tests dipped to average when compared with national figures and with similar schools. However, over three years, English is the strongest of the core subjects relative to national averages. In GCSE, results in English and English literature were above the national average, with one student achieving one of the top five marks nationally in GCSE English literature. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment has narrowed, particularly in English literature.
72. Students begin Year 7 with National Curriculum levels broadly in line with national expectations, but with fewer higher attaining students than average. By Year 9, overall attainment is above average and students' achievement is good. In Years 7 to 9, students' speaking and listening skills are good. They can offer and justify points of view with a good range of vocabulary. Students' reading skills are good and more able students can use inference and deduction skills effectively, supporting ideas with relevant evidence from texts. Writing skills are generally satisfactory, demonstrating the ability to write in a range of forms for different purposes and audiences. Paragraphing skills are sound amongst more able students, but there are weaknesses amongst middle and lower attaining students, particularly boys, that persist from Years 7 to 9. The spelling of higher attaining students is generally accurate but weaknesses are evident in Years 7 to 9 amongst middle and lower attaining students.
73. In Years 10 and 11, attainment is also above average and students achieve well. Students achieve good standards of oracy, and can express ideas clearly and thoughtfully using a good range of vocabulary. Reading skills show good levels of comprehension, inference and deduction, and higher attaining students demonstrate the ability to analyse and evaluate how meaning is conveyed in poetry and media texts. Students can write in a range of forms, matching style to purpose and audience, and higher attaining students experiment confidently with style using a range of sentence structures for effect. Students of average ability are confident with a range of styles.
74. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations of students and provide challenge in lessons. In the best examples, lessons contain a range of activities and a brisk pace to motivate students with whom there are excellent relationships. Support for those with special educational needs or lower attainment is

achieved through intervention, or by a learning support assistant where possible, but there were few examples of separate tasks set for students of different abilities. A marking code is used consistently across the department and comments appear on draft work and final pieces. However, there is some variation in the quality of the written feedback and it is not always clearly indicated to students what is required to progress to the next level. There were some examples of teachers modelling writing for students, but too few opportunities for students to investigate the organisation of writing in class activities.

75. The subject is well led and managed. Good subject leadership shows a commitment for improvement and a clear sense of direction. The department shares a sense of purpose, with teachers following schemes of work and adhering to a common assessment policy. Classrooms have informative and celebratory displays. The department provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including drama links between Year 11 and Year 12 students, theatre visits, poetry competitions and links with Loughborough University. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. The proportion of good and very good teaching has improved, and the gap between boys' and girls' attainment has narrowed in Years 10 and 11. Effective support is provided for students who join the school with below average levels of literacy through a well-organised programme of lessons and paired reading with sixth-form students.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

76. Standards of literacy across the curriculum throughout Years 7 to 11 are good. Literacy is promoted well across the whole school, and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is managed effectively by a senior manager. Funding is well deployed to staff the provision of a literacy programme for students who enter the school with levels of literacy that are below national expectations. This is very good practice. Specific responsibility for literacy has been given to the literacy co-ordinator who has held this post since 2001. During this time she has organised whole-school training on literacy across the curriculum, and has consulted staff widely and organised many worthwhile activities in support of literacy. The teacher with responsibility for teaching the Literacy Progress Units keeps staff informed of the focus of the sessions and this has been incorporated in library lessons. Many departments support the development of literacy through such activities as correcting spellings and the teaching of subject specific vocabulary. For example, in history, modern foreign languages, art and design and geography, teachers display key words on the wall and in history and art and design students are guided as to how to use them in context. In ICT, students are encouraged to collate information from Internet-based research, and history texts are chosen well and differentiated to cater for students with different abilities. Further provision is made to support reading by enlisting the help of sixth-form students to act as reading partners for Year 7 students in the literacy group. Records are kept of students' progress and are fed back to the teacher in charge of the literacy group.

FRENCH AND GERMAN

Provision for French and German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in recent years have been above average overall.
- Teaching is good and students learn well, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The department is well led and managed.
- In Years 7 to 9, the amount of time for languages is low in national terms.
- Students are not placed in ability sets until Year 8 and this adversely affects the pace of learning for some.
- Students generally behave well and are positive about languages.

- Opportunities for learning other languages are extensive.
- There is not enough use of ICT.

Commentary

77. French GCSE results have been mainly above average in recent years. Results dipped in 2003 to the national average, but the department reports that class sizes were much larger in that year than usual. Even so, students achieved well, to perform better in French than in most of their other subjects. In German, small numbers of mostly higher attainers have achieved consistently very well over recent years, to gain well above average GCSE results.
78. In Year 9, standards in books and lessons seen are broadly average. Students, including those with special educational needs and with English as an additional language, achieve satisfactorily overall in the time available, because of good teaching. Students, particularly boys, do not achieve as highly as they should do in French, because the amount of time allocated to French is lower than that recommended to cover the programmes of study. In addition, students are not put into sets until Year 8 which adversely affects the pace of learning for some. Behaviour in Year 8 on a few occasions is not of a high enough standard. In 2002, the teacher assessments of performance in Year 9 were below the national average. Results improved in 2003 but did not quite reach the national average. Two groups of higher attainers begin German in Year 9. They make a very good beginning for success in Years 10 and 11.
79. In Year 11, standards in lessons and books seen are above average. Modern foreign languages are an option at this stage, resulting currently in mixed-ability classes in Year 10. Students in Year 11, where top sets have been created, achieve well because of very good teaching, especially the higher attainers, in both French and German. Students have mostly very positive attitudes to their learning, make good progress in their written coursework and are confident in speaking skills.
80. Teaching is good overall and is often very good and even excellent. Students learn well as a result. Teachers know their students very well and give them much encouragement to succeed. In all years, teachers use the long lessons well, adopting a brisk and purposeful pace and providing a wide range of activities. Teachers understand the demands of the GCSE syllabus very well, and enable students to concentrate and make good progress in Years 10 and 11. There are particular strengths in the teaching of spoken and written French and German. Areas for improvement include the use of National Curriculum levels to let students know how they can improve, and a more consistent approach across the department to managing students' behaviour.
81. Improvement since the last inspection is good. New French textbooks and an earlier introduction of grammar have helped to sustain and improve on standards and attitudes, despite the reduction in teaching time.
82. The department is well led and managed. The head of department leads by example and expects, with considerable success, the teaching team to share her aspirations and sense of purpose. Opportunities to learn other languages are unusually numerous and take-up is good. However, use of ICT is underdeveloped, partly because of limited access. There are continuing shortages in textbooks and accommodation imposes constraints. The change to mixed-ability classes in Year 10 needs review because standards are being adversely affected.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The use of ICT is insufficient, both in planning and in lessons.
- Planning is well developed and the three-part lesson is a strong feature of all lessons.
- Marking and assessment do not make students clear about their current achievement and what they need to do to improve.
- Students have very positive attitudes and fully participate in lessons.
- Teaching is good, and the department operates well as a team.

Commentary

83. Attainment of students on entry to the school is average. Students make good progress and, by the time they reach the end of Year 9, national test results are above those nationally for the percentage of students attaining the nationally expected Level 5, and are in line with the proportion of students reaching the higher Level 6. Attainment is average in comparison with similar schools. Achievement is good across Years 7 to 9. The upward trend in results in national tests at the end of Year 9 has been maintained over the past five years. GCSE results have been below average, but the department has reviewed their practices in the light of these results and current attainment by Year 11 is in line with national expectations. Achievement is satisfactory by Year 11 and, given the consistent improvement in standards across all years, achievement is good overall. Students in all years demonstrate good numerical competence. They take a pride in their work and presentation is generally good.
84. The quality of teaching is good overall and, in some cases, very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and have high expectations of students. Lessons are well planned with three-part structures in line with the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Appropriately challenging objectives are shared with students, ensuring that they have specific goals to achieve throughout lessons. This results in a good pace of learning being maintained. Good levels of questioning ensure students remain focused throughout lessons. Students are encouraged and are confident to respond, even when unsure of the accuracy of their answers. Teachers use clear and concise terminology, ensuring students fully understand the meaning and significance of new vocabulary. Where extension or support work was provided in lessons it proved beneficial to all students concerned but this occurred infrequently. The quality of marking of students' work is inconsistent, ranging from very good to unsatisfactory. Where it is very good, students are provided with helpful and supportive guidance on how to improve their standards. However, far too many pieces of work are only marked cursorily. The setting of homework is patchy, with some students receiving two pieces of work every week, others receiving one and, in some instances, others receiving very little homework. Students learn well because they generally have very positive attitudes to mathematics and exhibit interest and enjoyment in their lessons. Students are attentive and well behaved.
85. The department functions effectively and is well led by the head of department. He has a clear vision about the future of mathematics in the school. A good departmental plan has been drawn up with appropriate targets, and these have been shared with staff. There is a strong team ethos within the department and morale is good. The curriculum is broad and balanced and is appropriate for all students, including those with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented. The management of the department is satisfactory. While it is acknowledged that the department effectively tracks the progress of students, the students themselves are not always clear about what aspects of mathematics they need to concentrate on in order to improve their standards. The head of department acknowledges that, while the

department has used ICT in a limited way, its use in planning and teaching needs to be developed further.

86. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, especially in the quality of teaching. The department has successfully dealt with the issues of the last inspection with the exception of the use of ICT in lessons, which is still too low, and issues relating to the marking of students' books. GCSE results have declined since the last inspection, but current standards in Year 11 indicate that standards this year will show improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

87. Students' general competence in mathematics is good, but too few opportunities are taken to develop further students' numeracy skills across the curriculum. All teaching staff have received training in the use of mathematics across the curriculum and the numeracy co-ordinator has produced supportive documentation for other colleagues. Some good examples exist of mathematics being used in other subjects but, in general, insufficient emphasis is made in lessons, beyond mathematics itself, to develop mathematical themes, ideas or concepts. In science, numeracy is incorporated in the scheme of work with emphasis on producing a variety of graphs and formulae. Spatial aspects are strongly promoted in art and design, while geography uses proportion, a range of graphs and statistical analysis. Calculating area, costs and estimating, as well as measuring and weighing, are features of the design and technology curriculum. In ICT, spreadsheets are used and in modern foreign languages reference is made to dates and number games.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above national expectations.
- The leadership and management of the department are both excellent.
- The arrangements for assessing and monitoring the progress of students are very good.
- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, work coherently as a team and know their students extremely well.
- A department of this size requires more than two science technicians.
- There are insufficient resources particularly with respect to ICT hardware.
- Laboratory accommodation is inadequate and some science lessons are taught in classrooms.

Commentary

88. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average and also well above the standard reached by similar schools. This shows a significant improvement since the last inspection. Standards are equally high by Year 11. In 2003, the percentage of students gaining grades of A*-C was 71 per cent, a figure well above average. The gifted and talented students also excelled in science at GCSE with 21 per cent of students reaching the A* or A grade standard. These results show a marked improvement over previous years and are due to the very successful changes made by the new head of department. In addition to the way in which she has successfully assembled a coherent team of well-qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic science teachers, she has also introduced a modular GCSE course which is much better suited to her students.
89. Students make very good progress between Years 7 and 9. Students' knowledge and understanding of science on entering the school in Year 7 is below the national average but, by the end of Year 9, they are well above average. This high level of science knowledge is further

developed in Years 10 and 11. The achievement of students in science as they move through the school is consequently very good.

90. This high level of achievement is largely due to the enthusiastic and consistently high quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are caring and concerned to do their best for the students. Their subject knowledge is very good and they prepare the students thoroughly for the external examinations. Students co-operate and take pride in their work. The department is incorporating many ideas from the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, such as the three-part lesson. Starter activities that quickly capture the interest of the students are particularly good and learning objectives are always thoroughly explained to the class at the start of the lesson and revisited at the end.
91. Due to the paucity of computer equipment in the department, the use of ICT was only observed in a couple of lessons. When used, it clearly improved the learning process for the students.
92. Lessons were judged to be only satisfactory when there was insufficient variety in teaching style and too narrow a range of stimuli used to capture the interest of the students. Reliable assessments of students' knowledge and understanding of the work covered, take place frequently so that students' progress can be monitored carefully. Well-focused support is offered to those students felt to be underachieving and the revision sessions offered by staff over the sixteen-week period before the terminal GCSE examinations are much appreciated by the students.
93. The leadership and management of the science department are both excellent. The head of department has a very clear vision for the future of science in this school. Fresh innovations are always being considered. The science department has been chosen by the LEA to be a 'lead department' and sets an exemplary standard for other science departments within the local authority.
94. Science teachers receive very high quality technical support but there are only two technicians to serve a large and expanding department. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs and puts unreasonable stress and pressure on all members of the department. Laboratory accommodation is also inadequate with some lessons taking place in classrooms.
95. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have greatly improved in all years due to significant improvements in the quality of teaching. Leadership and management of the department are now excellent and have led to much better arrangements for the assessment of students' progress and the use of data for target setting. Boys are now slightly outperforming girls; at the time of the last inspection boys were badly underperforming compared with girls. Significantly more students now opt to follow AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry and, to a lesser extent, physics.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching in ICT lessons is very good.
- The ICT department is very well led and managed.
- The progress made by students in Years 7 to 9 is very good in the limited time available; the time allocated for teaching ICT in Years 7 to 9 is below that recommended.
- The overall level of ICT resources does not allow for sufficient opportunities to enable students to use the skills learnt in ICT lessons to enhance learning in other subjects.

Commentary

96. About one-third of students have followed a business-based GCSE ICT course in recent years. Results in 2003 were significantly better than in the previous year. The number of A*-C grades was above the national average and all candidates passed the examination. These results represented good achievement for many of the candidates.
97. Work seen in ICT lessons, and in students' folders, shows that standards are above average overall by Year 9. The scheme of work follows the national strategy for ICT, ensuring that, by the end of Year 9, students have covered all necessary aspects of ICT. This is accomplished in less than the recommended time because of very good, and sometimes excellent, teaching. Teachers use a range of strategies which cater well for all abilities. Individual student needs are recognised and supported. Very good use is made of the Internet to provide interesting and motivating resources which helps to ensure that lessons have very good pace. The department has worked hard to develop and improve monitoring and assessment strategies which make a good contribution to teachers' ability to produce very good results within the limited time available for ICT lessons.

Example of outstanding practice

Use of Key Stage 3 National Strategy Activity in ICT to produce a three-fold, two-sided leaflet on organic farming, following a citizenship theme. Mixed-ability group with a wide spread of attainment.

The lesson featured excellent planning and rapid pace throughout. Lesson objectives were made very clear by the teacher at the start. A student operated the digital projector to demonstrate the main routines of the task, so that the teacher could ensure that everyone kept up and became familiar with the software. The main activity allowed students to research information from the Internet, and was preceded by a very effective question and answer session on the use of this resource and the issues, such as plagiarism, which it presented. Students were able to gain access to clear assessment criteria for this project on the school Intranet, so that they knew exactly how they could improve the standard of their work in relation to their capability. There was an excellent working atmosphere and sense of excitement throughout. The lesson ended with a very effective review on progress against initial lesson objectives.

98. This year, in order to meet ICT requirements for all students in Years 10 and 11, the GCSE course, which previously catered for one-third of students, has now been replaced with an ICT skills course which is timetabled for all. This course enables all students to learn and consolidate skills in a good range of core ICT software and to receive external accreditation. Standards overall meet nationally expected levels as a result of careful planning and very good teaching. Achievement is generally good because many students start the course with a limited level of skill due to previous shortcomings in provision for the subject. However, the level of work required lacks challenge for more able students. This has already been recognised by the school and alternatives are under consideration. Gifted and talented students from Year 9 to Year 11 are able to follow an ICT GCSE course which is taught in an after-school session. Attendance is good and these students are making very good progress.
99. The current, less than average, level of ICT resources limits the opportunities which students have to use and consolidate their ICT skills in other subjects. However, a programme is underway to improve the level of resources. For example, the learning resource centre has recently been re-equipped and the new machines are very well used throughout the day and after school. The leadership and management of the ICT department are very good. The department is playing an important role in the programme to improve the use of ICT within subjects by providing a computerised booking system for ICT rooms. This system is now used to track the use of ICT across the curriculum and helps to inform planning. The curriculum offered by the ICT department has undergone significant changes in the last few years. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good and this curriculum area has the capacity to improve further if current plans to improve resources are fulfilled.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

100. The use of ICT across the curriculum is significantly underdeveloped. The lack of ICT use across the curriculum was a key issue in the last inspection report. Despite recent increases in the number and quality of computers, the total is still below average for a school of this size, and the use of interactive whiteboards is currently very limited. However, plans to increase ICT resources further are well advanced. The large number of timetabled ICT lessons, which ensure that all students follow an accredited ICT course in which to improve their ICT skills, does limit opportunities for other subjects to use computers. A few subjects have ICT resources of their own, but these are not always used well. All teachers have recently completed a programme of ICT training but the full impact of this is yet to be felt upon the overall curriculum. There is some good use in religious education but it is unsatisfactory in mathematics and science and significantly underdeveloped in most aspects of design and technology. The use of ICT rooms is now monitored in detail by the ICT department and this should enable subject departments to make best use of the limited resources. It still remains the case that more opportunities should be planned into departmental schemes of work to enhance teaching and learning through the appropriate use of ICT. More specialist ICT resources are needed in both science and design and technology. Students have good access to computers outside lesson times in the re-equipped learning resource centre, while ICT rooms are open and used well by students at lunchtime and after school each day for homework, examination coursework and research.

HUMANITIES

GEOGRAPHY

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have not achieved well enough in recent GCSE examinations.
- The leadership of the department is good and there are clear strategies for improvement.
- There are examples of good teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 but the management of students' behaviour is inconsistent.
- Assessment does not always show students how to improve.

Commentary

101. GCSE examination results in 2003 were below average at grades A*-C, although all students passed at grades A*-G. Girls achieve better than boys. Recent examination results have a similar pattern. Geography is one of the weaker subjects in the school.
102. At the end of Year 9, standards are average, although there are fewer students achieving higher levels than those found nationally. This represents satisfactory progress and achievement. A minority of higher attaining students achieves very well and, on occasions, the presentation of their work is outstanding. Students use a wide range of recording techniques to construct well-proportioned maps and diagrams. Notes are well structured and there are good opportunities for accurate extended writing. Students from minority ethnic groups, and the few students at an early stage of English acquisition, are integrated well into groups. However, students within the lower sets, and students with special educational needs, can explain but find it more difficult to record their work and, in some instances, their poor behaviour adversely affects their learning.
103. Standards in Year 11 GCSE groups are near to average. Achievement is satisfactory. The majority achieves as well as they can, although the constraints on subject choices draw a small proportion of more able students to study other subjects.

104. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are examples of good, and some very good, teaching in Years 7 to 11, but this is inconsistent. All teachers have a specialist knowledge and understanding of geography. The better lessons are well planned and the lesson targets are clear. In these lessons, teachers manage behaviour well, and short tasks immediately capture students' attention. Teaching is unsatisfactory when the behaviour of students is not controlled effectively; this prevents the learning of other students and disrupts the flow of the lesson. Further weaknesses arise when the learning support assistant is not well prepared for the lesson and not used effectively, and where simple tasks are extended for too long and the pace of learning is slow. In such cases, behaviour can deteriorate, especially that of Black Caribbean boys.
105. The co-ordinator's leadership is good and management is satisfactory. Recently appointed, she has a clear vision of how best to improve the department. Schemes of work have been revised to provide good guidance. Assessment and marking, however, are not consistently well used by teachers; students do not always know how to improve their work. There is insufficient access to ICT. Two temporary classrooms are in poor condition and reflect adversely on the learning opportunities and departmental ethos. However, improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

HISTORY

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned and delivered with a focus on key historical skills.
- The positive attitude of students helps many to achieve well.
- The department is well led and there is an ethos of commitment and enthusiasm.
- Assessment of students' skills at the end of Year 9 is insufficiently rigorous.
- There is too much variation in teaching strategies, including assessment procedures, at GCSE.

Commentary

106. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with national averages. In 2003, they were below average and students' results were half a grade lower than in their other subjects. In both years, the achievement of boys was greater than that of girls when compared with national figures, although the majority of the highest grades were achieved by girls. The 2003 Year 9 assessments were well above average. This result is too generous, and results of some of the same students at GCSE show a considerable decline.
107. Standards of work are above average in Years 7 to 9 and show a considerable improvement from students' levels when they enter Year 7. Many make substantial progress in key historical skills and achieve well. They are able to analyse sources effectively. In GCSE classes, which are also mixed ability, standards of work are average. A Year 10 group was able to grasp the appeal of Hitler's ideas to the German people in the inter-war period. However, a lesson on the establishment of the Weimar Republic, that involved an imaginary press conference, was too ambitious and left some students confused. Standards of work by the highest attaining students are very good and many are able to produce accurate pieces of historical writing. Overall, achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
108. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have high expectations and much work has an appropriate degree of challenge. However, there is too much variation in the teaching strategies used at GCSE; some teachers focus too much on the development of some skills at the expense of others. Extension work is provided for the higher attainers, and lower attainers are set carefully researched tasks, which enable most of them to make satisfactory

progress. They achieve well when they have in-class support. Classroom management is very good in GCSE groups and good in other lessons, although all teachers need to follow the school's procedures when a student repeatedly disrupts a lesson. Marking is regular and often very helpful, but there is some inconsistency in the award of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades for different pieces of work in the same year group. The positive attitude of nearly all students, most pronounced in GCSE groups, benefits their learning.

109. Leadership and management are good. Among the teachers there is a real sense of shared purpose and mutual support. Departmental documentation is very clear, although it lacks a detailed action plan with a strategy for implementing targets and evaluating progress towards them. The number of classes split between two teachers is unhelpful to students' learning, especially at GCSE. The history learning of some less able Year 7 students is adversely affected by their withdrawal for literacy sessions.
110. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved by the end of Year 9, particularly those of average students and of boys. There is a much greater focus on important historical skills. Differentiated work is now available for the highest and lowest attaining students. The quality of marking and feedback to students is now good.

TECHNOLOGY

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good understanding of the requirements of the GCSE courses is a significant factor in promoting well above average attainment.
 - Overall good teaching and learning ensures that Year 9 students meet national expectations, and the GCSE results are well above average.
 - The use of computers makes too little impact on the quality of students' work.
 - Routine assessment in Years 7 to 9 does not ensure that students are aware of the standards against which their work is measured.
 - The curriculum for younger students does not offer the right balance between designing and making in all areas.
111. By the end of Year 11, students achieve well because teachers have a good understanding of the requirements of the GCSE examination and devise good courses which promote high attainment. As a result, the number of A*-C grades attained by students is well above the national average. Girls do better than boys but the gap is not as wide as that seen nationally.
112. Entering the school at below the nationally expected level of attainment in design and technology, students make good progress and reach the nationally expected standard by the time they reach the end of Year 9. Students achieve well because teaching and learning are good. The teaching of skills and processes is a strength and, as a result, students develop a good understanding of the correct use of tools and the working characteristics of materials. Overall, graphical skills are less good and, in some areas of the design and technology curriculum for younger students, skills of designing are less well taught. This is because some projects are too tightly focused on making and present too few opportunities to explore design ideas.
113. By the end of Year 11 students do better in design and technology than they do in their other subjects, which indicates very good achievement and is because overall teaching and learning are good. Standards are well above average. Design folders in all subjects reflect the high expectations of teachers, and students confidently present their ideas in written and visual

form. The evaluations students make of the properties and the working characteristics of materials is a particular strength and is a significant aid to learning. When students make things, the same high standards are expected. Students select and use tools and materials appropriately, and much work is finished to high standards. The opportunities provided, particularly in resistant materials for students to design and make by combining different types of material in items such as jewellery, clocks and lighting units, motivate students to achieve well. Students with special educational needs do well in design and technology; they find the curriculum accessible and their work is frequently of a similar standard to their peers. Students seen who have English as an additional language also achieve well. The quality of the assessment in Years 10 and 11 is a strength of teaching and is a significant factor in raising attainment. Students are given regular updates on their progress and clear guidance about how they can improve. The routine assessment of the work of younger students is less thorough. In Years 7 and 8, students are given little information about how well they are doing in relation to National Curriculum levels, which means they know little about the standards against which their progress is measured.

114. Overall leadership is very good and management is good. The head of department is a very good role model and has a clear vision of where further developments are needed, particularly in relation to the need to ensure ICT has a more significant impact on the work of the department. Some improvements in the provision of computer-aided design and manufacture have been made since the last inspection but these need to proceed at a much faster pace. The work of teachers in the department is monitored regularly, and appropriately linked to continuing professional development. Ensuring that some of the very good aspects of teaching seen during the inspection are more widely shared would be significant in raising attainment further, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
115. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. Standards have been maintained, and, with the exception of poor provision for ICT, all areas of weakness identified then have been addressed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

DRAMA

116. A sample of three lessons was observed. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 11, building successfully on average standards of entry into Year 7.
117. Attainment at GCSE is significantly higher than the national average with a high proportion of students achieving the highest grades when compared with national figures. As students progress through the school there is a clear development in their vocabulary, confidence, responsibility for managing their own learning and social interaction in group activities. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and provide a variety of activities to motivate students. In the lessons observed, the contributions made by students in Years 7 to 9 were not as great as within the GCSE classes but, in all lessons, students were involved in the activities. The very good teaching in Year 11 prepares students extremely well for the examination and relationships between staff and students are excellent. The GCSE moderator complimented the level of guidance given to the students in the preparation of their portfolios and the development of their work throughout the course and noted that some students demonstrated ability well above GCSE standard.
118. Extra-curricular activities include drama clubs for Years 7 to 9, LAMDA drama lessons after school, lunchtime clubs to provide extra tuition for students on the C/D borderline and annual performing arts showcases. These activities contribute to the positive attitude of students towards the subject. Since the last inspection, drama is now taught as a discrete subject across all years, rather than just at GCSE. The number of students opting to take drama has doubled and, from 2000, results in GCSE have risen significantly. The department has

conducted a thorough review of its performance and has a clear vision of the way forward. The leadership and management of the department are highly effective.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some teaching is very good and some is excellent, enabling younger students in particular to progress well and enjoy their developing skills.
- Plans for work are very good, covering a wide range of interesting media and ideas.
- Very good marking and assessment enable students to understand how to improve, but the department does not use data well enough to track individuals' progress against targets to ensure that they do not underachieve.
- The head of department is a very good leader and provides an excellent role model for trainee teachers.
- GCSE results have fallen considerably since the time of the last report and are below average.
- Staff absence and the use of non-specialist teachers have disrupted the progression of many students' learning; this has led to underachievement in some groups, with loss of focus and direction.

Commentary

119. GCSE results at grades A*-C have fallen from above average at the time of the previous report, to below average in 2003. Fewer students than average take the subject. Although results rose from 2002, students did less well in art and design than in their other subjects in both years.
120. Achievement varies considerably between teaching groups, but overall is satisfactory. Students enter the school with varying competence and experience in art and design, but average overall. Standards are also average by Year 9, although teacher assessments indicate that they were better than last year when staffing was more stable. Recent staff absence and illness have led to a decline in achievement and motivation in some classes. Other groups who have benefited from staff stability have progressed well, and very effective teaching has led to standards which are often above average for students' ages. Cover teaching maintains some aspects of consistency for students, although progress has been adversely affected for some by the absence of their teacher. Year 11 has developed sufficient independence to be less affected by staff absence than Year 10; students in both Year 11 classes covering the expected range at GCSE. Some students do well given their prior attainment, but others lose motivation easily. This particularly affected one of last year's three GCSE groups who had non-specialist teaching. While two groups attained average standards, some students in the third achieved poorly. The subject manager is aware of the need to prevent recurrence of any loss of momentum amongst current GCSE groups.
121. Teaching and learning seen on inspection varied significantly. Teaching is good overall. Excellent teaching from the advanced skills teacher in the department enables younger students to develop very good levels of excitement and interest using a good variety of media. They respond eagerly and progress well. A courteous, sensitive style of managing difficult behaviour is highly effective in enabling students to understand how their challenging attitudes cause problems. Subject knowledge and teaching experience here are very good indeed and rightly utilised locally as a model for teacher training. Other teaching has provided satisfactory stability during absence, but lacks this dynamic drive. Assessment and marking are usually very good, giving students good opportunities for self-evaluation and enabling them to see how to improve. Use of data for tracking students' progress against targets is not good enough, however, so underachievement is not halted soon enough.

122. Leadership and management are good overall. Subject leadership is very good with exemplary and innovative leadership of the curriculum. Management has been good in maintaining satisfactory achievement, despite the difficulties imposed by staff absences. The department has made a satisfactory improvement, overall, since the last report. Identified weaknesses were related to ICT which is now used satisfactorily. The fall in standards at GCSE is the key weakness.

MUSIC

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers have good subject knowledge which supports students' learning.
 - The number of students choosing GCSE music is increasing.
 - The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is not broad and balanced.
 - Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not used effectively to support learning.
123. Standards are average by the end of Year 9. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were below average; the previous year's results were much better.
124. Between Years 7 and 9, students' musical understanding improves. This represents good achievement considering the majority of students enter Year 7 with undeveloped musical skills. By Year 11, standards are average but this is good achievement as most students have developed better performing skills compared with their prior attainment. When teaching matches the standard of activities to students' abilities, their learning increases and they make good progress. Very few students learn instruments, and the orchestra and the choir are small. Students have benefited from workshops with the philharmonic orchestra.
125. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good overall, and students learn well. They are motivated and work hard when lessons are well planned, as in a Year 9 lesson on reggae. Here, students used layering techniques on the keyboard computers to build up their well-defined musical examples. When lessons become repetitious, learning suffers, as in a Year 8 lesson, where students who had little knowledge of keyboard technique struggled to play a simple melody. Assessment is not secure in Years 7 to 9 and National Curriculum levels are not displayed or known to students.
126. Students in Years 10 and 11 respond well to the good teaching overall; this helps them make a positive commitment to learn. Because of the teacher's accuracy and enthusiasm, serial music and the clapping patterns of Steve Reich come to life and make the music more accessible to students.
127. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The development plan is an effective contribution to the joint effort in gaining specialist arts status. The plan to introduce music technology in the sixth form next year is also creating interest. However, in Years 7 to 9, assessment procedures are inadequate and the scheme of work does not sufficiently address all the programmes of study for the subject. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are poor and have not inspired close teamwork amongst staff.
- The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, particularly for girls.
- Many girls have a poor attitude towards physical education.
- Standards and levels of achievement for boys are good in most lessons.
- Whilst good standards are reached in team sport, the range of extra-curricular provision is limited, especially for older students.

Commentary

128. Poor leadership and management lead to a significant number of students underachieving, either because they are not taking part in lessons or are not motivated and challenged to work hard enough to improve their performance. This is mainly girls, but also a significant number of boys in Year 7 where staff illness has disrupted the normal approach to standards of behaviour, work and participation. This issue has been allowed to deteriorate because of a lack of direction, low expectations and limited professional communication. There has been no formal monitoring of teaching to ensure consistent application of teaching methods and policies. As a result there is a mixed picture in standards and levels of achievement by Years 9 and 11 but, at both stages, standards are below average overall and achievement is unsatisfactory. Even where students show ability, too many have been allowed to lose interest.
129. The boys in Year 9 have average ball skills and are able to transfer a range of strategies into rugby and hockey. They are achieving well. The girls have below average ability in orienteering and their level of fitness is low. They are underachieving. A minority of girls are average in netball and achieve well. They have good ball handling skills and are able to apply tactics. This is especially the case for the team players in Years 7 and 8. They are tenacious in their approach to defensive play and have good spatial awareness. Students with special educational needs are often able sports players and achieve as well as their peers.
130. Standards and levels of achievement are similarly reflected by students in Year 11. The boys become more consistent in their performance but the girls have below average standards in aerobics and basketball. Most students have a basic knowledge of the importance of warming-up before exercise. However, their knowledge of health-related fitness factors is below average. It is not taught as a separate unit of work or woven into schemes of work. Their ability to coach, plan and evaluate is still an area for development.
131. Those students in Year 10 who have chosen to follow the new GCSE course are average in their theoretical knowledge and above average in their practical performance. Their recall of knowledge under test conditions is limited and requires more revision and practice.
132. Whilst the overall quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, there is a significant number of lessons that are good, leading to positive learning and students achieving well. This is mostly in boys' lessons and in GCSE examination classes. These teachers manage and motivate the students effectively. Question and answer sessions are used well to provoke thought and consolidate knowledge of rules, techniques and tactics. They make rapid progress. However, too many other lessons are slow to start and lack pace. This is partly due to an apathetic approach by the students and a lack of desire to refine their skills. Tasks chosen do not challenge all levels of ability within the class because little use is made of assessment or special educational needs information. Poor planning means a considerable amount of time is spent waiting to perform. The significant number of students who are not participating are not involved in learning and spend most of the time chatting on the sidelines.

133. Much of the girls' increasing apathy is a result of the narrow curriculum, which is undoubtedly exacerbated by the unsatisfactory quality of accommodation. However, more could be done to add variety to the range of activities on offer, especially in Years 10 and 11. There have been positive moves to improve the provision with the employment of a school sports co-ordinator who has a good range of ideas. There has been unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection with few of the issues successfully addressed. Insufficient progress has been made in the variety of teaching methods, the use of assessment and the minority of students who do German in Year 9 who still miss one lesson of physical education each week. There continues to be limited response to inspection findings.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The provision for personal, social and health education is very good and supported well by a range of visiting speakers. It is well planned to cover all the required topics, and the quality of teaching, although varied, is carefully monitored to address areas for improvement.

CITIZENSHIP

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The religious ethos of the school provides a good basis for the development of students as responsible citizens.
- The school chaplain and the religious education curriculum make good contributions to the citizenship programme.
- Residential experiences, and the Justice and Peace Day for Year 9 students, impact positively on students' personal development and their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world around them.
- Because teachers do not make learning objectives for citizenship explicit in lessons, students are not always aware when they are learning about citizenship.

Commentary

134. Citizenship is taught through the PSHE curriculum, through specific events and through a range of other subjects. Planning has been thorough, with one of the senior staff involved in a European initiative to develop an international course on active citizenship that has resulted in a training package for the diocese. Most of the elements that make up the statutory requirements are covered but not yet formalised or made explicit so that students are not yet able to identify a clear subject curriculum for citizenship.
135. The school's ethos is based on gospel values and this means that students learn to respect and value other people and the environment. The success of this is seen through students' good relationships and tolerant attitudes, and through the considerable amounts that are raised for charity. The group leaders on the Year 9 residential course last year commented on how well students respected each other's opinions. Many Year 11 students find their retreat at Kintbury a life-changing experience.
136. Teaching and learning are satisfactory although during the inspection it was possible to observe very few lessons in which citizenship featured significantly. Several PSHE lessons, which covered elements of the citizenship curriculum, were seen, and teaching and learning in these varied from very good to unsatisfactory because they are taught by tutors, most of whom are non-specialists. On the other hand, this does mean that students are taught by teachers who know them well and this both aids the process of assessment and creates a secure environment within which sensitive moral and social issues can be openly discussed. This was illustrated well in a very good Year 10 lesson on human rights violations. Students made

good gains in their understanding of the way in which they can affect civil rights issues and also in their knowledge of subject concepts such as propaganda and bias.

137. Students benefit from the presence of the school chaplain. Each year, as part of his role, he organises the Justice and Peace Day for all Year 9 students. Workshop sessions with speakers from Amnesty, Traidcraft, Star (Students Assisting Refugees), and workers from the diocese, the local council and the St Vincent de St Paul Society raise students' awareness of a range of issues and of how they can be active participants in community activities. All Year 8 students this year will take part in the Botanic Gardens simulation exercise in which they will run a developing country for a day. This should provide practical participation in decision making and problem solving and address many of the elements of the citizenship curriculum.
138. The school has made a good start in introducing this new subject. The logbook provides a good basis for the assessment of each student's development as informed citizens. Much remains to be done. Some departments, such as modern foreign languages and science, are already planning citizenship into their schemes of work, but too many other subjects have not yet accepted their responsibilities in this way. The school, however, is well placed to effect further improvement. After several senior staffing changes, responsibility for citizenship now rests with the assistant headteacher who has the vision and the status to take the subject forward.

VOCATIONAL PROVISION IN YEARS 10 AND 11

139. The school offers a pre-vocational option to selected students in Years 10 and 11. This features placements at a further education college or with employers, and a Youth Award programme to develop students' life skills and vocational skills. Students are making good progress in developing their Youth Award portfolios. A good lesson seen was conducted at a brisk pace and skilfully managed by the teacher, with a good variety of activities to maintain students' interest and enthusiasm. A lack of ICT facilities in the dedicated room, however, constrained the progress of the students and limited their vocational experience. Students say that they have been able to get a good experience of the world of work and training in their placements with college or employers.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for the eight courses as completed in 2002 where numbers entered were large enough to allow national comparisons to be made.

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
English Literature	6	100	94.4	16.7	37.9	35	38.9
Mathematics	7	57.1	74.2	0	34.3	17.1	31.3
Sociology	13	61.5	83.7	26.2	33.6	26.2	33.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English Literature	20	100	98.5	50	43.7	87	84.3
Mathematics	8	100	93.3	87.5	52.2	102.5	84.7
Biology	5	100	91.6	60	36.3	100	74.1
Sociology	16	100	95.4	37.5	39.6	80	79.1
Art	5	100	96.1	40	48.7	76	85.1
Performance Studies	6	100	98.3	50	36.8	90	81.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

English literature was inspected in depth. The AS level English language and literature course and the English GCSE re-sit course were sampled, as was A-level French. In English language and literature, teaching and learning are good and students are making good progress in using and understanding new concepts and subject terminology. Year 12 GCSE results in English and English literature in November 2003 were good with two-thirds of students gaining one or two higher grades. Teaching and learning were good in the lesson observed.

In French in 2003, A-level results were above average and most students performed in line with expectations from their GCSE grades. AS results were lower than expected overall. Over recent years A-level results have been consistently above average. In the lesson seen, teaching was very good and students learned and achieved very well, especially in speaking skills.

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and caters effectively for all students, including those who speak English as an additional language.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent. Students have positive attitudes and enjoy forming and developing their own ideas.
- Effective assessment and monitoring procedures support good achievement.
- There is not enough rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.
- Very good support for coursework leads to high standards in these modules.
- A significant number of students does not read widely enough.

Commentary

140. Results in A-level examinations vary quite significantly from year to year and there is no clear trend. In 2002, results were above average with 50 per cent of students achieving grade A or B and all gaining a pass grade. Results fell in 2003 but all students passed the examination and most achieved grades that matched those predicted by their performance at GCSE. Given that over half were predicted to achieve grade D this represents good achievement. Indeed, one such student achieved grade B. In addition, a significant number of students had a home language other than English and these students achieved as well as those who spoke English as their first language. This reflects the good support offered to these students. Although the department operates an open access policy into AS and A-level courses, retention rates are good, but this also affects the final results with a significant number of students who gain the lowest pass grade in AS examinations continuing into Year 13.
141. The variation between different year groups is apparent in the current groups. In Year 13, standards are broadly as expected at this stage in the course but, in Year 12, standards are above expectations. This is partly because of the introduction of the joint language and literature course in Year 12, which has attracted many of those students who enjoyed English at GCSE but who are not avid readers of fiction. The work seen in lessons and in students' work confirms the wide range of attainment. The higher attaining students have very good analytical and critical skills, write with insight, can evaluate different interpretations of the text and express a lucid and well-argued personal response. Lower attaining students communicate their ideas clearly but their analysis of texts is relatively simple and lacking in detail. Students at all levels make good progress in developing knowledge and understanding of the historical and social context of texts and enjoy the independent research they are required to undertake.

142. The quality of teaching and learning is good, although learning in the smaller groups in Year 13 tends to be more dependent on the teacher than it is in larger groups where both group and class activities lend themselves to more animated and challenging discussion. There is a good focus on how to achieve well in coursework and examinations, and particularly helpful marking of coursework drafts which set up a dialogue between teacher and student. This has a major impact on standards, especially for lower attaining students whose performance in written examinations is weak. Good provision is also made for the highest attaining students who are able to attend other institutions for lessons leading to the Advanced Extension Award. Students respond well to teachers' realistic expectations, and they work at a good pace in lessons, although some do not read widely enough to build up an all-round general knowledge and understanding of literature. Students appreciate their teachers' accessibility and the readiness with which they give of their time to support their students.
143. Leadership and management are good; there is good teamwork within the department and a commitment to continuing professional development. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of the teaching and learning in the department, partly because of temporary staffing arrangements last year. One of the effects of this is the variation of marking in students' files. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection within the changing nature of the school. The department now caters effectively for a wider range of students and has developed good provision for students with English as an additional language.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

144. Students have generally good language and literacy skills, which help their performance across the curriculum. The induction course at the beginning of Year 12 extends students' literacy skills through the teaching of key skills, such as note making, essay planning and writing. Marking in most departments addresses spelling and grammar and there are good opportunities for extended writing and for discussion and presentations.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics at AS and A-level were inspected in detail. Further mathematics in Year 12 and GCSE re-sit provision was also sampled. Further mathematics A-level results are regularly above average. A satisfactory lesson was seen in which students completed what was expected with a high degree of competence. Teachers' insistence on good attendance leads to a large majority of Year 12 GCSE students successfully completing the course and improving the grades they achieved in Year 11. The timetable provision for re-sits is good and although the overall attainment is below the national averages, individual achievement is at least satisfactory with a number of students with special educational needs making good progress.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good achievement in Year 13 has resulted in the school sustaining improvement in A-level results.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is matched well to the curriculum and is particularly effective in improving the achievement in Year 13, and that of GCSE students who have been on the school's register for special educational needs.
- A high proportion of students who started the AS course in 2002 did not complete the qualification in 2003.
- Teachers' high expectations of behaviour and commitment ensures students have good levels of application and productivity.
- The effectiveness of teachers' planning of lessons is constrained by a lack of records of regular assessment of students' work.

Commentary

145. Year 13 A-level results in mathematics and further mathematics are regularly above the national averages and show that good value is added to the students' AS results.
146. The increasing use of flexible criteria to enable more Year 11 students to gain access to Year 12 AS mathematics courses results in a wide range of ability among students on entry. 2002 AS results were in line with the national average as were standards of work on the AS course seen during the inspection; such standards represent overall satisfactory achievement for the students involved. Students taking the AS course know that they need to continue into Year 13 to complete sufficient modules to be awarded an overall AS level, but a consequence of this policy is that a high proportion of students who started mathematics AS in Year 12 in 2002 did not complete the course and left at the end of Year 12 without a mathematics qualification.
147. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Good teaching and learning occurs in lessons when very good teacher subject knowledge and high expectations of behaviour and commitment result in good pace; in such cases students rise to the challenge of using and applying alternative approaches and vocabulary to new ideas. However, a significant amount of teaching is over-reliant on the examples and questions provided by the textbook. Information technology, other than the use of graphic calculators, and other resources are not used enough to stimulate enthusiasm and to develop and extend learning at the appropriate time.
148. Overall, leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Teachers are matched well to the curriculum and prepared for the national changes in 2004. The department uses data analysis annually to measure the overall progress of the different teaching groups, and the standards of individual attainment are reviewed periodically as part of the school's progress review system. However, the absence of easily accessible records, to show more regular assessment of student progress, results in some lessons not being planned to provide an appropriate challenge to maximise the achievement of all students. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

149. Overall, students' competence in using number is good and supports learning in their subjects. There is, however, little planned provision to support students' skills of numeracy in subjects other than mathematics.

SCIENCE

Biology was inspected in detail, but physics was also sampled. In physics, examinations results have been consistently above average over recent years. In 2003, students generally achieved results that were above those predicted by their GCSE grades. A very good Year 12 lesson was observed. The subject is taught by physics specialists who have excellent subject knowledge and a real enthusiasm for the subject. Students are regularly entered into the international Physics Olympiad competition and the department recently received a commendation from the Institute of Physics for the coursework submitted by a student.

BIOLOGY

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and facilitates learning.

- Results are well above national averages.
- Assessment and record keeping are very good.
- There are very good relationships between staff and students.
- Larger group sizes, particularly in Year 12, mean that there is sometimes a shortage of apparatus.
- The use of ICT, particularly data-logging, is underdeveloped due to a shortage of equipment.

Commentary

150. The GCSE A-level results in 2002 were well above the national averages and all students achieved a pass. There was a slight drop in the results in 2003, with fewer students gaining the higher grades, although all students achieved a pass. A high proportion, however, did not pass at AS level. Retention rates on courses in biology are very good.
151. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, and these are achieved because of good teaching and the positive attitudes of the students. In relation to their standards at the start of Year 12, their achievement is good and they make good progress as they move through the sixth form. Students in Year 12 have a good knowledge of the structure and function of the blood vessels and the heart in mammals, and Year 13 students are able to identify parts of the kidney from microscopic samples and describe their function.
152. Teaching in biology is good, enabling students to learn well. Teachers have sound subject knowledge, which enables them to give clear explanations to students and helps them to understand difficult concepts. Lessons are well planned with a variety of activities and have a brisk pace, which maintains the interest of the students. Teachers' expectations are high and they question students frequently during lessons to reinforce knowledge and understanding. Friendly working relationships between teachers and students mean that students are not afraid to ask for help if they need it. Students are encouraged to foster their independent learning skills through mini research projects following which they give presentations to their peers. Marking of students' work is thorough and gives helpful advice on areas for improvement. Assessment takes place regularly and students are always aware of their progress. Homework is set on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions. The department makes good use of outside agencies, such as nearby universities, whose staff visit and deliver lectures, and students are given the opportunity to visit the local hospital for a day to experience the job opportunities available for students interested in the biological sciences, which further promotes their interest. There is insufficient use of ICT, particularly data-logging, due to a shortage of equipment.
153. Students learn well and make good progress in lessons because of the good teaching and because they are mature and highly motivated. Many of them need to do well in biology because of their career aspirations, which further motivates them. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges, as shown in question and answer sessions, and their written work shows evidence of hard work. Answers to written questions are clearly explained and show clarity and depth of thought. They display competence in practical skills and work co-operatively, sharing ideas in a mature and sensible way.
154. Leadership and management of the department are very good and the high standards seen at the last inspection have been maintained. There is a good team ethos amongst the staff, who are all committed to improving results. Assessment and record keeping are very good; students are fully aware of their progress and parents are kept well informed. Regular meetings take place so that the staff can share ideas and expertise. The accommodation and resources are satisfactory, although larger group sizes now mean that some of the specialist equipment necessary for sixth-form work is insufficient, which can inhibit the amount of practical work done. The department receives very good technical support, although this is insufficient in time allocation. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in computing is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A-level have improved.
- Teaching on the A-level courses is good.
- Assessment is effective; students know what the need to do to improve their grades.
- The department should continue to develop strategies to improve results at AS level.

155. A-level computing results, for the small number of candidates who took the course in 2003, are likely to be well above the average for the higher A-B grades when national comparisons become available. All candidates attained at least a pass grade in the examination. The average points score was consistent with the overall school average. This was a very significant improvement over earlier years when there were no higher grades and a significant proportion of ungraded candidates. At AS level there were no higher A-B grades although about one third of candidates attained a C grade. Only a small proportion of candidates was ungraded. Results at AS level in 2003 were below the school average. They have been below both the school and national average in past years.
156. Evidence from computing lessons and students' portfolios indicates that standards in the sixth form are average overall, although some good work was seen at both A-level and AS level. Students achieve well in relation to their capability; they have come through a curriculum where ICT experiences were limited in many respects. Teaching and learning are good overall. In an A-level lesson, students were able to demonstrate at least a satisfactory and often a good grasp of theory which related to processors, memory and storage. This was as a result of a well-planned and a challenging card-based classroom activity which was used by the teacher to simulate the process of searching and sorting. Clear, articulate responses from students indicated a generally good understanding as they manipulated the cards appropriately and explained the process. Challenging supplementary questions from the teacher helped to clarify issues and prompt a higher level of thought and analysis from students. In an AS lesson on system design, once again, a practical group activity was used to good effect, and data flows within the school were identified and analysed well by students. The teacher worked hard to involve all students in the activity although a minority needed significant prompting.
157. Work in folders is well organised by students and assessment is good. Students' work is annotated well with detailed diagnostic comments by the teacher. There were examples of very detailed corrections of number work. The range of attainment was much wider in Year 12 work than in Year 13, reflecting the grades in the AS examination over recent years. Advice and guidance are very well focused and are effective in enabling students to make good progress. Students know what they need to do to improve.
158. The recent improvement in the level and quality of ICT hardware has had a positive impact upon teaching and learning. However, the availability of interactive whiteboards within the department could be of great benefit and could enhance collaborative work in lessons. The leadership and management of AS and A-level examination courses within the ICT department is good. There was no information about post-16 ICT in the last inspection report for comparative purposes but significant improvements have taken place recently in results and in the level of resources.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

159. Students' competence in ICT is generally satisfactory, although many have experienced a curriculum earlier in the school in which ICT experiences were limited. There is now reasonable access to computers for sixth-formers to engage in independent work in their study area and in the library. Within subjects, however, there are difficulties of access and equipment

shortages which preclude effective use of ICT to support learning. Such deficiencies are particularly evident in mathematics and biology.

HUMANITIES

Sociology was inspected in detail, and lessons in geography, history and psychology were sampled. One lesson of geography was observed in Year 13 and there was a brief observation of Year 12 work. Students in Years 12 and 13 work to the standards expected for AS and A-level. Teaching and learning were good in the lessons seen. The Year 13 lesson demonstrated well the problems associated with the spread of aids in Africa and how the liberation and better education of women could reduce the disease.

In history, A-level results have fluctuated in recent years. The 2003 results showed considerable added value compared with the GCSE results of the same students. The AS results in 2002 were better than the national average and this was repeated in the 2003 results. In the lessons seen, the quality of teaching and learning was good in a Year 13 group. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the Spanish-American conflict of 1898, students learned very well as the teacher skilfully explained how to plan an essay which required reasons for an event to be listed in priority order with supporting factual evidence.

Psychology results have also fluctuated over time. A-level results in 2002 showed good achievement for students while those in 2003 were weak; AS results, however, were good in 2003. A good and a very good lesson were seen during the inspection. Students demonstrate very good recall of theories and approaches and apply these effectively when asked to do so in lessons. Lessons offer an engaging mix of activities which make effective use of resources.

SOCIOLOGY

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High quality teaching inspires students to achieve very well.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good and enthusiastic.
- Students choose this new subject because of its perceived contribution to higher education.

Commentary

160. Sociology is a popular course in Year 12 and groups are large. In 2002, AS examination results were close to those achieved nationally for grades A and B but below for grades A-E. In Year 13, all A-level students were successful, with four gaining a grade A or B. The majority of the candidates were girls, although the current group is more balanced. For many students, sociology is their best subject.
161. Year 12 students make very good progress and achieve very well after one term of study. They quickly acquire a very good level of knowledge and understanding of sociology and contribute to informed class debate. Students with English as additional language read aloud from sociological reviews with very few pauses over technical vocabulary. In class, students prepare for an enquiry into the conjugal roles of men and women in their own households and, from their own guesstimates, calculate the time spent on their respective tasks. They hypothesise on the changes that have occurred in the last ten years and readily recognise the stereotyping of domestic activities. There is a broad spectrum of achievement within the group but their analytical skills are very well developed in this new subject.
162. Standards are above average and achievement is very good in Year 13. Students respond particularly well to issues surrounding the amplification of deviance through news of crime

reports. The lessons observed were based on the Damilola Taylor case, but the students' in-depth reading and knowledge of current affairs allowed them to illustrate other cases where the moral panic the media creates 'makes it appear it happens all the time'. Students from minority ethnic groups are sensitive to the Taylor issues but readily contribute exemplars which show a very mature grasp of sociological issues. Study skills are well developed and notes are a clear basis for extended essay writing. Higher attaining candidates prepare coherent arguments and conclude written work with their own clear and concise opinions. The work of students of average ability reflects a rapid improvement in their knowledge and understanding of how changes in traditional beliefs become reflected within the social and cultural development of modern society. Students value the subject as a basis for higher education because they achieve very well.

163. The teaching of sociology is very good and on occasion excellent. The style engages the students in their learning and they are keen to succeed as well as they can. They enjoy the challenge of teaching, which plans progress very effectively and has the highest expectations. References to recent and locally published research fuels academic rigour, and often seminar style teaching is inspirational. Question and answer sessions probe students' knowledge and understanding and invite balanced and mature comment. Teaching promotes no antagonism when dealing with sensitive issues and relationships are excellent. Students readily listen to the views of others.
164. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The subject leader is responsible for all teaching of sociology. However, meetings with other sociologists in the university and the examination board provide regular opportunities for emergent discussion of sociological views. The subject is well resourced. Study programmes are incorporated into booklets, which include notes, model answers, suggestions for independent study and examination preparation. Marking and assessment are thorough. Standards continue to rise and are reflected in the projected target grades for 2004 and 2005. The large Year 12 group's activities are more limited by the number studying the subject and the size of the teaching room. Sociology, as in the last inspection, continues to make a valuable contribution to the success and overall growth of the sixth form and improvement is very good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The product design AS and A-level courses were sampled. Standards over time are above average with most students achieving well in relation to their capability. One good lesson in Year 12 and a satisfactory Year 13 lesson were seen. Design folders of Year 12 students showed well-developed skills of analysis, evaluation and presentation. Investigations into the properties of materials were a strength and a reflection of good teaching.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and performing arts were the focus subjects, and a lesson of A-level music was sampled. Numbers are too small in music to offer a comparative analysis of exam results. Achievement in the lesson seen was satisfactory and the student seen was a capable musician. Because of the quality of teaching he was able to improve his composition for voice, guitar and bass.

ART

Overall provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching, which harnesses students' personal interests and enthusiasms and promotes achievement, is above expectations.

- The opportunities provided for students to work in a range of media is a significant factor in raising standards.
- The dedicated Years 12/13 studio provides a stimulating and positive working environment for students.
- A better balance needs to be struck between preparation work prompted by secondary sources, such as photographic imagery, and ideas made by drawing directly from the visual world.

Commentary

165. A significant factor in ensuring that students achieve very well is that teachers foster their personal interests and enthusiasms and provide the opportunity and encouragement for them to explore the potential of different media and styles. As a result the majority of students exceed their potential. Over time, both at AS and A-level, standards have been above the national average. In 2003, results were less good but in most cases students exceeded their potential.
166. The first complete project of those currently doing the AS level courses is above average, showing a developing ability to research ideas combining and experimenting with both media and modes of expression. This is a reflection of very good teaching which is a balance of high quality technical instruction, as seen in the lesson where instruction on casting was provided, and the sensitive encouragement given to students to develop and extend their own ideas. Teachers provide students with the opportunity to work in a variety of media ranging from film to wood carving, as seen in the work of those currently in Year 13. Standards attained by these students are average overall, but the majority are meeting or exceeding expectations and some students are estimated to gain the higher A and B grades. Very good teaching is also evident in the way contextual studies projects challenge and extend students' understanding of the work of artists from different times and places, but particularly in the way they are encouraged to make connections with their own work, as seen for example in the film-based work inspired by the photographs of Cindy Sherman. The rich sketchbook work students are required to do as preparation for each project indicates that teachers have a very good understanding of the requirements of the course, which are interpreted in an imaginative way. In their preparation, students bring together ideas drawn from a variety of sources, but the balance between ideas collected from secondary sources and those made by drawing directly from observing the visual world needs to be tipped more in favour of the latter.
167. A significant factor in the good achievement of students is the very good leadership and management provided by the head of department, and the clear direction for the course which results is a reflection of this. Effective management is evident in all aspects of the course but particularly in the thorough assessment procedures, which provide information about the progress students make, giving a clear indication of the strengths and weaknesses in the work of each individual. Since the last inspection, there has been very good improvement. Standards have been maintained, and the recent provision of a studio for the sole use of Years 12 and 13 is a significant strength. This, too, is well organised, has stimulating displays and provides a positive environment in which to work.

PERFORMING ARTS

Provision in performing arts is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Subject leadership is outstanding.
- The very high standard of teaching inspires students and enthuses confidence in their learning; because of this they achieve very well.
- Positive relationships make a large contribution to the students' personal development.
- There is a history of high examination results.

- The school's new arts status should enable the department to have enhanced accommodation and resources.

Commentary

168. Results in both the AS level and the A-level examinations in 2003 were well above average for all students although there was a slight dip in the number of A-level passes at grades A and B. Although male students were in the minority, there was no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students.
169. The standard of practical work in both the AS and A-level courses is well above average and shows very good achievement overall because of the commitment of students and the excellent teaching taking place. Although research and extended writing is weaker for some students, the standard of work is still high and supports the very good results being achieved. Retention is good and, in discussions with students, they enjoy the variety of work and would recommend the performance studies course to others. Some want to continue in arts-related education or work, and all stress that the course has given them a very firm basis on which to take up a career in any discipline.
170. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Students learn well because they are exposed to a varied diet in the arts that carefully matches their needs and interests. Because of this, Year 12 students devise work of a high standard on the theme of isolation that skilfully draws in the emotions and communicates directly with the spectator. Year 13 students use Artaud's work 'The Totem' as a basis for their strident piece to challenge and disturb the audience. Group dynamics are very strong which contributes to students' positive attitudes and personal development. They respond well to the teaching and the artistic experiences to which they are exposed.
171. Performing arts is successful because of the outstanding leadership and management of the head of department. Her drive and energy has played a major part in the school securing arts status and she has built up a successful team that supports her vision for the future. Meticulous records are kept and assessment plays a major part in driving up standards; there is constant monitoring and evaluation of students' work. The department runs a wide range of school and community arts-based projects and the major ingredient of the well-established yearly trip abroad is the performance workshops and street theatre put on for foreign audiences. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

BUSINESS

The GNVQ business studies course in Year 12 was inspected in depth. Economics was sampled. The most recent examination results at A-level in economics were very close to the national average and all candidates passed the examination. These results represented a good improvement over the previous year and good achievement for the students. Results at AS level were below average and a high proportion of students was ungraded. Teaching and learning seen in lessons were good. The new economics teacher has considerable experience of work in the financial sector of the economy, which provides a valuable insight into many aspects of this subject. Teaching has appropriate pace, and there is considerable emphasis upon the correct use of economics terminology and upon current examples of United Kingdom and world issues. More opportunities should be provided for students to become self-reliant by leading activities in lessons, for example through collaborative work, based upon student research and group presentations.

BUSINESS STUDIES

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some students, especially boys, achieve well and are working towards higher grades.
- The compulsory nature of the course for its students as the only vocational option creates unhelpful negative attitudes.
- About half the numbers of students who start each year leave or fail to get a grade from their studies.
- Teachers often reverse the hostile, negative attitudes with which many students embark on the course.
- The course provides a good opportunity for some lower attaining students to mature enough to take up higher level courses next year.

Commentary

172. Provision for business studies in the sixth form is through the GNVQ Level 2 (Intermediate) course. This course is compulsory as part of the core subjects GCSE re-sit programme which about 20 to 25 students start each year.
173. Of the 22 students who started the course in 2002, only 11 completed it. This drop-out rate is exceptionally high and the school believes much of it to be connected with the fact that students leave the school altogether once they have completed their GCSE re-sits. The drop-out is from the school rather than from the course. The pattern was very similar for students who completed the course in 2002 and is likely to recur this year. Students frequently move into employment.
174. In 2003, the final results of the eleven who completed the course broadly matched national expectations. Most were passes and merits with one who did not succeed. The appropriateness of the course, for the half of the cohort who fail to complete it, is being assessed as part of the changes necessary when the national provision for this qualification ceases this year. 2002 results were much weaker. Too many students failed to gain any qualification.
175. The group of 20 who started in September 2003 has already been reduced by three, who remain on roll but have left. Within the remainder, standards are very mixed indeed, as are students' attitudes. Students and staff speak of the resentment felt at being compelled to do this course. This compulsion itself generates negative responses from most students when they begin. Staff have to work hard to overcome this and the reversal of these attitudes in many is attributable to the teaching in the department. About a third of the cohort now values

their learning about business matters and is achieving better than might be expected given their low prior attainment. This minority of students' standards in folders and portfolio work currently show that they could ultimately achieve the higher merit grades or better. About half the original cohort's standards show them unlikely to pass, mirroring previous years' patterns. Several of these students could do better, but persistent unconstructive approaches hinder their better achievement. Overall, the spread of attainment is currently average, but skewed towards the lower end with too many underachieving.

176. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Staff do their best to quash initially hostile resentment, and frequently succeed, particularly with boys. Real-life work experience from outside the classroom is used effectively in teaching. Timetabling of a complete morning for these students provides useful opportunities to do work outside the classroom. Planning of this four-hour period is usefully varied when students remain in school. Students develop appropriate levels of independence in working, particularly when using ICT. Assessment is good and students value the regular monitoring and formal comments about how to improve their work.
177. Management of the subject by the ICT department is satisfactory. Teachers also work in ICT, and monitoring of, and support for, teaching have been good. Staff understand the requirements for assessing students' levels and moderate work properly. The nature of provision for business studies in this compulsory way is, however, unsatisfactory. Currently, the course usefully fulfils the function of an interim year for some participants to mature before they embark on an advanced Year 12 course here or elsewhere. As such, it is valued by parents and supports the school's ethos effectively.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

The personal, social and health education programme offered to sixth-formers is an extension of that offered to students in Years 7 to 11. It is a programme of very good quality, which offers a comprehensive package of advice, support and guidance, study skills and citizenship education. One good lesson was sampled in which students showed good awareness of effective citizenship and in which Year 13 students worked hard to design a brochure offering advice on university applications for Year 12 students.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).