

INSPECTION REPORT

JOHN MASON SCHOOL

Abingdon

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123256

Headteacher: Mr J Cunningham

Lead inspector: Mr I Hodgkinson

Dates of inspection: 15th – 19th September 2003

Inspection number: 259244

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,058
School address:	Wootton Road Abingdon Oxfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Professor C Batty
Date of previous inspection:	February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

John Mason School is one of three secondary schools serving the town of Abingdon and surrounding villages. It is about the same size as other secondary schools nationally. The school has a comprehensive intake, drawing students from a wide range of attainment levels and social circumstances, though on the whole the school draws its students from an area which has relatively favourable social and economic conditions. Students' entitlement to free school meals has been below or well below the national average over time. However, a relatively high proportion of the school age population in Oxfordshire opts for private education, and the three independent day schools in Abingdon attract many pupils from higher-income families. Students' attainment on entry fluctuates around the national average, although it also varies from year-to-year, especially in English. There are relatively few students from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students whose mother tongue is not English is higher than in most schools. The proportion of students with special educational needs is broadly average, though the proportion of those with statements of need is below average. Most students who need support beyond action which can be taken by the school itself have emotional, behavioural or moderate learning difficulties; others have severe learning difficulties, speech and communication impairment or specific learning difficulties.

The school works strongly in partnership with others in the area. The sixth-form partnership remains a strong feature of post-16 provision; it is comprised of the other two secondary schools and a college in Abingdon and offers a very wide range of courses to students. The majority of John Mason sixth-form students do some learning off-site, although most of their programmes take place in their home school. John Mason School teaches only AS and A2 courses – all vocational provision is delivered elsewhere, and students who wish to follow mainly vocational courses transfer to the college.

The school is raising funds to support a bid to become a specialist arts and media college; the bid is being submitted jointly with its partners in the area. It has Investor in People and Sportsmark awards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	Lead inspector	Community
14214	Ms G Smith	Lay Inspector	
20527	Mr B King	Team inspector	Mathematics
12191	Mr C Moxley	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
05241	Dr C Millband	Team inspector	Science
28106	Ms M Majid	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
31688	Mr B McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design
31779	Mr V Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology
07582	Mr D Roberts	Team inspector	Geography
30216	Mr A Elliott	Team inspector	History
31649	Mr R Marsden	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
08360	Mr F Peacock	Team inspector	Music Special educational needs
31821	Mr B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
20719	Ms A Fraser	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship
04359	Ms W Hola	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English (sixth form)
20420	Mr S Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Biology
02774	Ms E Gillmon	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (sixth form)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school has a strong ethos which encourages its whole community to take part in making decisions and to share in its successes. Students at the school achieve well at all stages, and the quality of education provided for them is good. **The overall effectiveness of the school, and the value for money it provides, are satisfactory.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students participate strongly in the life of the school, and respond well to the many opportunities presented to show initiative and take decisions.
- The school works very effectively in partnership with other schools in the area to improve opportunities for students and staff.
- The curriculum has good breadth throughout and is well suited to the needs of the students, especially in the sixth form. Students' experiences are enhanced by a very wide range of enrichment activities.
- Achievement is not high enough for middle and lower attaining students in mathematics in Years 10 and 11.
- There is not a sufficiently rigorous system in place for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning and for spreading good practice.

The school has made satisfactory improvement since its last inspection in 1997, when standards and the quality of education were also good. Satisfactory progress has been made against most of the key issues raised at the last inspection, but heads of departments still need to be more effective in evaluating teaching quality, and the school still does not meet the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship. Good progress has been made in improving provision for information and communication technology, and in achievement in modern foreign languages.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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 good.

- Standards of students in the current Year 9 are above average, and show improvement since the 2002 test results. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9, and very well in art and design.
- Standards seen among students in Years 10 and 11 are above average and their achievement is good, except for middle and lower attainers in mathematics. Overall GCSE results in 2003 marked a considerable improvement on those in 2002. Students who took GCSEs in 2002 did very well in relation to their scores in their Year 9 national tests in 2000.
- Standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students achieve well. They show high levels of skill, and the ability to work independently, solve problems logically, and think critically.
- Students with particular needs, including the able and talented, those for whom English is not their mother tongue, and those with other special educational needs, achieve well in the school because of the appropriate provision made to support them.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Their attitudes, and their behaviour in lessons, are good. The school encourages students to reflect on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues through well-planned Quest and citizenship programmes, and offers many opportunities for students to take responsibility and show leadership. Behaviour by a small minority of students outside lessons is unsettling, especially for younger students. The school works hard to keep those whose behaviour is the most challenging in education and training; the number of exclusions is low.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good, and there are many examples of very effective teaching where work has been well planned to meet the needs of all students in the class and to move the students forward to clearly identified higher levels of performance. These strengths are seen particularly consistently in art and design, design and technology, music, physical education, and also in geography where teaching standards have improved considerably. Teaching quality varies between subjects and between teachers in the same subject because of a lack of consistent approaches to teachers' planning of work, and the way in which assessment is used to plan effectively. Where teaching is unsatisfactory it is largely because lessons do not offer a suitable level of challenge.

The curriculum is good, and organised with increasing flexibility to meet the needs of students from Year 10 onwards. The range of applied and vocational courses is good, and the school works well with partners and external agencies to provide for disaffected students, some of whom have been excluded from other schools. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities support students' personal and physical development strongly. The school works closely in partnership with other schools and its local community to improve opportunities and resources for students and staff; the sixth-form partnership arrangements work particularly well in this regard.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher gives the school good direction and ensures that its aims of 'high standards, happy school and honourable service' are at the heart of its planning. The school's leadership, including the governors, has a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision, much of which is gained from listening to the views of the school's users. The management of the school is satisfactory; it has set about tackling key weaknesses such as homework and the under-performance in certain subjects, but lacks rigour in ensuring that policies and best practice are implemented consistently by all teachers. Governors similarly, while providing satisfactory scrutiny and good support to the work of the school, are not always rigorous enough in ensuring that the school completely fulfils its statutory duties and updates policies. Leadership and management of the sixth form overall is good.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students show strong support for the school. In particular, they feel it is a good school to be at, and that the teaching is good and teachers very supportive. They have concerns about the behaviour of a minority of students outside lessons. Parents would also like to see improvements in the quality of reporting of students' progress.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- improve the quality of planning in mathematics lessons in Years 10 and 11 so that lower and middle attaining students are offered an appropriate level of challenge;
- adopt more rigorous systems for ensuring that policies and best practices to improve teaching and learning are implemented by all teachers;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- make arrangements to allow a daily act of collective worship.

	THE SIXTH FORM AT JOHN MASON SCHOOL	
	This sixth form is smaller than average, but is part of the much larger Abingdon 16 to 19 partnership through which students have access to a very wide range of courses	

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good, cost-effective sixth form, and its students achieve well. It has made good improvement since the last inspection: up to 2002, results improved strongly and there has been a significant increase in the numbers of students on roll.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- standards of work are well above average in many subjects;
- the quality of teaching and learning is good and often very good. Lessons are stimulating, challenging, and employ a range of methods;
- partnership arrangements are well managed to provide a very broad range of subjects for students. The leadership shows very good vision in seeking further improvements;
- sixth formers play an active part in leading activities in the school;
- there is no system for monitoring the movements of students on and off site to ensure their safety.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Very good in English. Standards are high and achievement good. Learning is challenging and enjoyable.
Mathematics	Good. Achievement is good; students work hard and teachers have very good subject knowledge, though planning for improvement is weak. A very good lesson was seen in further mathematics where achievement is good.
Science	Good in biology , where achievement is good and standards above average. Excellent teaching was seen in chemistry. Teaching was satisfactory in a lesson seen in physics.
Information and communication technology	Good in the AS/A2 courses, where good teaching results in students achieving well. For students not following these courses, support for the development of their information and communication technology (ICT) skills lacks coherence.
Humanities	Very good in history , where students achieve very well and teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Very good lessons were seen in geography and psychology, but students are rather too passive in sociology lessons.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Very good in product design. Standards are high; students' presentational skills are excellent. Students achieve well and teaching is very well planned.

Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design , where very good teaching ensures students have a real depth of knowledge and understanding. In music, the teaching was also very good, and students' attitudes excellent. Achievement is also good in drama.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good in physical education . Students are committed and work hard, and achievement is consistently good.
Business	This area was not looked at in depth, but in a very good AS lesson students had clearly acquired good understanding of business constraints.
General education	A lesson in the personal and social education programme was very well planned to give effective advice on higher education for each student.

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 get good personal and academic support. They have ready access to well-informed and impartial careers information, and good guidance when choosing their course options. There is not daily contact with tutors because of students' need to move between schools, but the weekly personal and social education session is very well planned to incorporate important careers guidance and to broaden students' thinking on a range of issues. Students are kept well informed about their progress on their courses, even when taught outside the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is led very effectively. Although the partnership arrangements with three other schools and a college are now well established, there is still a very clear vision about how provision can further improve, including a broadening of enrichment activities and the need for more support for key skills such as learning with information and communication technology. Sixth-form provision is well managed, despite the challenges of co-ordinating provision across four institutions. The quality of courses in all schools is monitored by success rate indicators which incorporate exam results and rates of retention of students on courses. This data helps subject co-ordinators evaluate the quality of their work, though there is no system in place for closer monitoring of lessons. Financial arrangements for involvement in the partnership are clear and well-understood; the sixth-form students get very good value from the school's commitment to the partnership in terms of the very broad range of choices made available to them.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students, in interviews and questionnaires, expressed strong satisfaction with the sixth form. They are particularly appreciative of the way in which the partnership opens up choices for them, and those who do go to other schools for lessons identify very few problems with the arrangements. Students feel strongly that the quality of teaching is good and that the school is well run. The concerns expressed through the questionnaire related to the quality of careers advice and guidance, which inspectors found to be good, and to the range of enrichment activities available, which the school is addressing through the appointment of an enrichment co-ordinator.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Overall, students achieve well at all stages. Results in national tests and GCSEs have improved recently, and standards are above average in most subjects by Year 11. Results in the sixth form have been well above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth-form results in 2002 were strong; sixth-formers achieve well, and as a consequence a high proportion of students are able to take up places in further or higher education.
- Higher attaining students do well at GCSE.
- GCSE results improved markedly in 2003 in geography, French and German where they were previously very weak.
- Standards in science and mathematics have risen across Years 7 to 9 and in the Year 9 tests.
- There is significant underachievement in mathematics in Years 10 and 11, among middle and lower attainers.

Commentary

1. The attainment of students who join the school in Year 7 fluctuates around the national average, although it varies from year-to-year, especially in English. The school's results in the Year 9 national tests have been above the average for all schools nationally over recent years, and over time results have improved at the same rate as those nationally. This indicates broadly good achievement. In the Year 9 tests, boys' results overall have just about matched those of girls, so the gap between boys' and girls' results is narrower than it is nationally. In those tests, boys do better than girls in mathematics, and by a wider margin than in most schools. Higher attaining students do well in the tests in mathematics. English test results have generally been weaker than those in mathematics and science, and have fallen short of targets, especially for higher attainers.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.4 (33.4)	33.3 (33.3)
Mathematics	37.4 (36.5)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	35.5 (34.4)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 178 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Statistical analysis of the 2002 Year 9 test results revealed some weaknesses in relation to the students' scores when they were tested at age eleven in 1999: in mathematics, English and science, students in 2002 failed to meet targets which had been set with reference to the students' assessed capabilities. In 2003, however, results were much improved with science exceeding its target results and mathematics coming very close. For English, while there was a decline in average points score as shown in the table, the proportion of students getting to the national average Level 5 and above in their tests improved. Inspectors report that for most subjects, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is currently above average, and that overall achievement is good. In art and design, standards are high by the end of Year 9; students have the capacity to work independently of their teachers in a variety of media and materials. In mathematics, science, citizenship, design and technology, geography, music and physical education, achievement is good; while in English, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and

religious education, achievement is satisfactory. Achievement in English and history is better in Years 10 and 11 because students have a clearer idea about how they need to improve the standard of their work in these years.

- GCSE results, measured by average points per student, were broadly average in 2001 and 2002 but had been above average in the previous two years. Over time, the trend in the school's GCSE results has improved in line with the national trend. Results in 2003 again marked a significant improvement, with students attaining their highest GCSE points since the last inspection and a significant rise in the proportion of students gaining five grades A*-C. Severe weaknesses in the GCSE performance in French, German and geography were overcome in the 2003 results, but the pass rate in mathematics declined. Mathematics results have been relatively weak at GCSE, especially for middle and lower attainers, and inspection confirmed that there is still underachievement in this subject in Years 10 and 11, largely because teachers' expectations of students' capabilities are too low.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	48 (41)	50 (48)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	87 (84)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (90)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	40.6	39.8

There were 180 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Students do particularly well at GCSE in art and design, design and technology, ICT and physical education. They continue to achieve well in these subjects in Years 10 and 11 (very well in art and design); and achievement is also good over these years in science, citizenship, geography, and history. In French and German, achievement is now satisfactory, as it is in English and religious education.
- The school recognises the particular needs of students, and mostly supports their achievement well. Able and talented students do well, with higher proportions of the most capable students getting top grades at GCSE than is the case nationally. Students with special educational needs and disabilities achieve well and make good progress towards their personal targets. This is because of the high standard of co-operation and planning that takes place between teachers and teaching assistants in lessons. Since work is adapted to match students' needs this helps to improve their learning. All students with special educational needs leave school with recognised qualifications. Students for whom English is an additional language also make good progress as a result of good teaching and good links with specialists from the local education authority.
- The quality of students' work throughout is supported by good skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing, effective use of number, and a good capacity to use computers independently.

Sixth Form

- Standards of attainment are high in the sixth form. 2002 A-level and AS results were well above average for males and females, and analysis of those results shows that the students did well compared with other students nationally who gained similar GCSE results to theirs. Results in 2003 also indicate good achievement for the students involved.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.4	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	62	39.4
Average point score per student	297.4 (228)	263.3 (na)

There were 61 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points

8. In all of the eight sixth-form subjects looked at in detail on this inspection, the students achieve well; indeed in art and design and in history, they achieve very well because of the advanced level of skills which students acquire quickly and their capacity to analyse evidence carefully and think critically.
9. Students overall demonstrate effective study skills and the ability to work independently, although some are constrained in research by weaker skills in the use of ICT.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is **satisfactory** overall and **good** in the sixth form. Students of all ages usually arrive at school on time and their punctuality to lessons is good. Students in Years 7 to 11 have a positive attitude to school and their overall behaviour is satisfactory. Although they are usually well behaved during lessons, a minority become rough and boisterous when they are not directly supervised. Their behaviour sometimes unsettles their fellow schoolmates and can make them feel insecure. Students in the sixth form behave very well at all times and their attitudes to learning are very positive. Permanent exclusions are very rare and the number of fixed period exclusions is below the national average. Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students of all ages like coming to school and their attitudes and punctuality are good.
- The attitudes and behaviour of students in Years 12 and 13 are very good.
- The number of exclusions is low.
- Relationships between students and with teachers are good.
- Students participate strongly in school life and respond well to the many opportunities provided.
- The behaviour of some students during breaks and lunch-times is unsettling.
- There is not a registration procedure for students in the sixth form moving on and off site.
- Some students are too passive during lessons.

Commentary

10. During the school year that preceded the inspection, the attendance of students in Years 7 to 11 varied widely. While it was good in Year 7, the poor attendance of a minority of students in Year 11 reduced the overall figure for the school to below the national average. Many of these students, however, were absent because they were facing challenging circumstances and, with their co-operation, the school arranged extended work experience placements. Although their attendance at school was low, the school knew exactly where they were; very few of these absences were unauthorised. In order to improve the procedures used to follow up absence, the school has recently appointed an attendance officer and her involvement is resulting in a more standardised system, as well as strengthening links between home and school.
11. Students of all ages usually behave sensibly during lessons. The majority co-operate with their teacher well and they work constructively on their own or in groups. Despite the best efforts of their teacher, however, some are reluctant to make an active contribution. In

addition, a small number of students of all ages misbehave during break-times if they think they can get away with it. Although teachers take it in turns to remain on duty, the layout of the buildings makes supervision of the site very difficult. Some students take advantage of this and their behaviour can become boisterous and unsettling. During discussion, students in Year 7 said they sometimes feel threatened and insecure. The school works hard to meet the needs of all students, however, and the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions is below the national average. Its methods for modifying behaviour and resolving disputes between individuals are innovative and embody the principles of 'restorative justice'. The school encourages students who misbehave to develop a sense of personal responsibility for their actions through reflection, discussion and repair of damage. Its system for offering the student body rewards for good collective behaviour, and reducing those rewards when there are instances of anti-social behaviour, is well understood by students and serves to further strengthen their sense of collective responsibility.

12. The school fosters students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, well. There are plenty of opportunities for students to voice their opinions and to become involved in the many activities. Students respond to this provision well and their personal development is good. They increasingly understand the importance of considering each other's needs and they respect different cultures and faiths. The majority develop into responsible, sensible and sociable young people. Students are quick to use their initiative; the school council is held in high regard and has helped to bring about numerous improvements to school life. For example, representatives have successfully lobbied for the construction of a pedestrian crossing and traffic calming measures in the road outside the school.

13. Students with learning difficulties are happy in school and generally attend well. They show positive attitudes towards others and behave well in lessons. The learning support team sets high standards to cultivate students' personal development and self-esteem. Students described as gifted and talented are well catered for with good enrichment opportunities.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.5
National data	7.8

Unauthorised absence	
School data	2.2
National data	1.2

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

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	311	39	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	1	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
Information not obtained	733	0	0

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

Sixth Form

14. While students' attendance is recorded in individual lessons, the school does not calculate overall attendance for the sixth form. During inspection week, however, students' attendance at lessons and their punctuality were good.
15. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They develop into mature and responsible young people and respect each other's views. They behave very well and there have been no exclusions. Students take responsibility for their own actions and very good links within the 16-19 consortium help them to understand how they fit into the wider community. They are keen to participate in numerous areas of school life. For example, they organise and run the school council, represent students' views on the sixth-form committee and help to run extra-curricular clubs, such as sport and music.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. Students are well taught by specialists who have good subject knowledge, and they learn well. A good, well balanced curriculum is enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Students have access to good quality advice, support and guidance.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Students are well taught by specialists who have good subject knowledge, **and they learn well.** Where teaching and learning are not as good it is largely because they are not planned well enough to take account of what students can do and what they need to do to raise their level of attainment. **Assessment** of students is **satisfactory** overall, but needs to be used to more consistent effect in showing students how to improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are mostly specialists who know their subjects well.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good; students like and respect their teachers.
- Teachers in many subjects deploy a range of methods, including the use of ICT, to make learning effective and enjoyable.
- Where they are available, assistants are very well utilised to support the learning of those students with special educational needs.
- Students develop a very good capacity to work independently and improve their own learning in practical subjects like art and design, design and technology and physical education.
- Assessment practices vary between subjects, and in some subjects assessment is not used well enough to help students improve.
- The quality of teachers' planning also varies considerably from subject-to-subject, with weaker planning leading to less effective learning.

Commentary

16. During the inspection, there were many examples of very effective teaching where work had been well planned to meet the needs of all students in the class and to move the students forward to clearly identified higher levels of performance. These strengths were seen consistently in art and design, design and technology, music and physical education, and also in geography where teaching standards have improved considerably. In these subjects, good planning ensures that lessons have real pace and purpose, and it is accompanied by very effective management of students and of their behaviour. Students are encouraged in these subjects to work independently and take a good deal of responsibility for improving the quality of their work, within clear guidelines.
17. Teaching quality varies between subjects and between teachers in the same subject because of a lack of consistent approaches to teachers' planning of work, and the way in which assessment is used to plan effectively. The quality of planning in English and in history is not as good over Years 7 to 9 as it is over Years 10 and 11; students therefore learn less well in the earlier years because lessons have less pace and challenge. In English, as in religious education, students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve. Inconsistencies in planning and marking are the main reasons for differences in teaching quality in the science and modern foreign languages departments. Assessment is an important weakness in mathematics, where students need to be clearer about how their work measures up to expected standards. Generally, where teaching was unsatisfactory, it was because lessons were not planned to offer a suitable level of challenge in the activities set. A high proportion of unsatisfactory lessons was seen in mathematics in Years 10 and 11.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 159 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	39 (24%)	68 (43%)	43 (27%)	7 (4%)	1 (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.

18. Teachers are mostly specialists who know their subject well. In most cases they use a variety of methods to engage and encourage the students, including the use of computers and out-of-class activities. Students respond well – they usually apply themselves well in lessons and they like and respect their teachers. Parents' and students' comments and questionnaire returns, and the quality of work in some books, indicated that the setting, completion and marking of homework had been weak in some subjects in the past. The school has addressed this problem, by introducing a system whereby homework is available

in advance and completion of homework is monitored electronically. Although just started at the time of the inspection, the new system is working well.

19. Students with special educational needs learn well and make good progress because of carefully planned teaching programmes. Individual education plans include effective strategies to enable students to reach their targets. Assessment, planning and target-setting helps raise achievement even further in the communication skills of reading, spelling and number work. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the progress of students with a statement of educational need, enabling them to enjoy a full curriculum with other members of their class.
20. Students for whom English is an additional language are suitably identified and satisfactorily assessed. Those who are at an early stage of learning the language are taught well, and the school has good links with the local education authority's specialists. Students for whom English is an additional language make good progress.

Sixth Form

21. Lessons observed in the sixth form were more consistently good than in other years; indeed, just over half of the lessons seen were very good. In all of the subjects inspected in detail in the sixth form, teaching and learning overall is at least good. Lessons are frequently stimulating and challenging; teachers, who have very good subject knowledge, use a range of methods to help students learn. Work is particularly well planned, with a clear focus on developing fundamental knowledge and understanding. Teachers' skilful questioning techniques extend students' abilities to think critically. Lessons are mostly characterised by a high degree of participation from the students, although in sociology students tend to be rather too passive. Students develop a very good capacity to work independently. They organize their learning well, and their research skills are mostly strong, although some might benefit from more support in using ICT.

The curriculum

Overall, the breadth and quality of the curriculum are good, and the curriculum is organised with increasing flexibility to meet the needs of students from Year 10. **An extensive range of extra-curricular activities** supports students' personal and physical development very strongly. The school has **sufficient accommodation and resources** to meet the needs of the curriculum, and a good, well-qualified teaching force.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum in most cases meets the needs of students well.
- Extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities support learning very well and make a very effective contribution to students' personal and physical development.
- The good citizenship aspect to the curriculum is effective in promoting ideas of rights and responsibilities.
- The teaching staff is well qualified to meet the needs of the curriculum.
- Tutor time is not used well and fails to provide a sharp and purposeful start to the school day
- There is not a daily act of collective worship.
- Students in the sixth form do not mix academic and vocational courses or have programmes to support key skills.

Commentary

22. The curriculum is good, and organised with increasing flexibility to meet the needs of students from Year 10 onwards. The range of applied and vocational courses is now good, and the school works well with partners and external agencies to provide for disaffected students, some of whom have been excluded from other schools. This includes off-site work experience programmes. The school has a good record of finding training, education or employment for those on its flexible programmes; the students are well supported by the student support officer.
23. The impact of setting arrangements in some subjects has been investigated by the school's effective learning group, which was concerned about progress of students in lower sets. Inspectors found that the quality of learning and progress made by students was affected more by the quality of teachers' planning to provide appropriate challenge to students, rather than the setting arrangements in themselves. Good learning was seen in lower sets in many subjects, but sometimes, as in mathematics and German, where teachers' expectations were too low, learning was unsatisfactory.
24. There is good provision for students with special educational needs. Individual education plans are effective and allow students to have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The special educational needs co-ordinator liaises well with teachers and there is a close working relationship with the local education authority agencies. Because of this, those students with a statement of need are given good support to improve their learning and personal development. Some students who display challenging behaviour have anger management sessions and there is a flexible learning programme for older students who become disaffected with school.
25. Literacy skills have been well developed across the curriculum, with good focus on speaking and listening in modern foreign languages, and good use of annotation and technical vocabulary in art and design. While there is not a numeracy policy for all subjects, some subjects have taken lead roles in teaching the use of number, leading to satisfactory graphical work in science, geography and ICT, and to sound measurement and geometrical construction in design and technology. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. The school has focused on the development of ICT to improve student achievement. However, while the use of ICT is evident in the work of some departments, such as design and technology and music, in others it is still at an early stage of being developed.
26. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities supports students' personal, cultural and physical development strongly. There is a high level of participation in these activities at lunchtimes and after school. A strong feature of the organisation of these activities is the extent to which older students play a leading role; they are encouraged and developed in this by their teachers. In sport and the arts, extra-curricular and enrichment activities help to further support the attainment of students. Frequent trips and visits offer further enrichment to many subjects in the curriculum.
27. The school develops students' understanding of right and wrong, and of citizens' rights and responsibilities, through well planned programmes of Quest and personal, social and health education. Citizenship projects and focused days, looking at, for example, issues surrounding life in Britain's larger cities, further help to raise students' awareness of the challenges facing society and the roles that they can play. Statutory requirements are met for religious education, but the time given to religious education in the sixth-form programme is very low. The school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Form time is not well used; here opportunities are missed to get students to reflect on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues which are covered so well elsewhere in the curriculum.
28. The teaching staff are well qualified and effectively deployed to their areas of specialism, but the school has faced difficulties in recruiting qualified staff in key subjects, including

mathematics. The school's accommodation varies in quality by subject, reflecting the way in which it has been extended block-by-block over the years, but it is sufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation for science, modern foreign languages, ICT, geography, history, music and physical education is good. Pressure on accommodation is, however, evident in a number of regards; teachers have to manage students' exit from lessons very carefully in the main school building because of safety concerns over narrow corridors and stairways, and art rooms are too small for the size of groups. Resources are mostly sufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum, and computer facilities in particular are now good. There are some textbook shortages. The school has introduced a £25 deposit for textbooks in order to promote better care for the items, but difficulties arise for staff and students in setting work when the student has not paid. The learning resources centre is very well managed and very active in initiating programmes which promote learning and literacy.

Sixth Form

29. The school works closely in partnership with other schools and its local community to improve opportunities and resources for students and staff; the sixth-form partnership arrangements work particularly well in this regard. Students who complete their compulsory education at John Mason School are offered a very wide range of choices of further study through the Abingdon 16-19 partnership. They can access courses which are not available at the school, or use lessons taught at partner schools to overcome timetable clashes. Those who wish to take vocational courses at Level 2 or 3 are well provided for within the partnership in the sense that they can go to the college to take the courses. Those who choose to stay at John Mason, however, do not mix their vocational and academic routes, making course breadth rather narrow. There is not a co-ordinated programme of support for students' key skills, including ICT, at present.

Care, guidance and support

Students receive good personal care and child protection procedures are effective.

Individuals who are known to be vulnerable, as well as those who face challenging personal circumstances, are particularly well supported. **Routine health and safety procedures are satisfactory**, although some points of concern were raised during the inspection. Sound assessment procedures and individual mentoring help teachers to provide **well-informed personal and academic advice and guidance**. As they move through school, students receive plenty of **clear and impartial advice about future course and career options**. **The school involves students very well in its work and development**; it actively seeks their views and, wherever possible, acts upon their suggestions.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- This school looks after its students well and they receive good personal support.
- Child protection procedures are effective.
- Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' achievements and personal development are good.
- Well-planned and thoughtful induction procedures help incoming Year 7 students to settle quickly.
- Careers guidance is good and students have ready access to plenty of clear and impartial information and advice about future courses and career opportunities.
- The school actively seeks students' views and makes good efforts to accommodate their suggestions and preferences.
- There is no system for monitoring the movements of students on and off site.
- The wildlife area is overgrown and unkempt.
- There is not sufficient separation between students and traffic on the school site.

Commentary

30. Students are well looked after during the school day and members of staff provide good personal support and guidance. Links with external agencies are very good and these help the student support officer and Connexions personal advisers to offer strong support to students who are facing particular difficulties. Child protection procedures are in place and are well understood by staff. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory. The school, however, does not always know exactly who is on site. Traffic flows around the site with little clear separation of students from that traffic. In addition, the wildlife area is overgrown and unkempt; this makes it difficult to oversee the pond, thus endangering students' safety.
31. Students say that their teachers are approachable and speak warmly of the support they provide. Inspectors agree with these positive comments; good personal care is backed up by satisfactory assessment procedures, and regular progress checks allow underachievement to be recognised and action taken to help students improve. The school has a sound commitment to race equality, which is reinforced through its curriculum work in citizenship, and in its promotion of international links. Monitoring of progress by ethnicity is undertaken, although the small numbers in minority ethnic groups make statistical analysis unreliable. The school's individual monitoring programmes are good enough to identify individual needs and to deploy appropriate support. Good induction procedures help incoming Year 7 students to settle in quickly. Careers education is good and students are offered plenty of relevant and impartial advice on future courses and possible careers.
32. The school actively seeks students' views and, wherever possible, acts upon them. The school council is well regarded and students have recently helped to revise certain policies, such as the behaviour and bus safety policies, as well as influencing improvements such as traffic calming measures outside the school. Students concerns about the poor standard of some of the toilet facilities are gradually being addressed.
33. Teachers and teaching assistants know individual students with special needs very well. Whilst achievement is recorded not all subject teachers include levels when providing progress reports for students with statements prior to reviews taking place. Careful records are kept and students' individual education plans are reviewed regularly with new targets set to raise achievement. The special educational needs co-ordinator has close contact with feeder primary schools so that there is a smooth transition for students moving to the secondary stage. Each lunchtime the teaching assistants run a club which helps students to improve their social skills and personal development. There is the opportunity to talk informally to staff, to play board games, work on computers or just to relax.

Sixth Form

34. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and they say that their teachers provide good personal and academic help and support. Inspectors agree with these positive views. Routine health and safety procedures are satisfactory. Students, however, are not required to sign in and out, which means that there is no written record of exactly who is on site during the school day. This would lead to difficulties should there be an emergency evacuation of the site.
35. Students have ready access to well-informed and impartial careers information. Each student is offered at least one interview with a personal adviser prior to transfer to the sixth form. Students say that they receive good guidance when choosing their course options and that there is plenty of careers information available. Links with Oxford Brookes University are close and 'taster days' give students a valuable insight into higher education.
36. The school actively seeks students' views and encourages them to become involved and to express their opinions. Students respond very well; they organise the school council and can also serve on the sixth-form committee or senior student team. Wherever possible the school incorporates their views into future plans and acts upon their suggestions.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links between home and school are satisfactory. Links with the local community are good and students regularly take part in events such as the mayor's concert. **Links with other schools and colleges are very good.** The school works strongly in partnership with other schools in the area to maximise opportunities for students and staff.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school actively seeks parents' views and does all it can to act upon them.
- Links with parents of students with special educational needs are strong.
- Parents provide good support for extra-curricular activities, for example, in sport and music.
- Links with the local community are good.
- The school works very closely with other schools and colleges in order to provide students with access to a very wide range of educational opportunities.
- Reports to parents do not include sufficiently clear information on students' progress nor explicit targets for improvement.

Commentary

37. The school is keen to maximise parents' involvement their children's education. It maintains a website and also issues regular newsletters to parents and carers. These provide lots of useful information about the many day-to-day events within the life of the school. Links with parents of students who have special educational needs are especially close and this constructive liaison helps to ensure that these students make good progress in their work. Parents provide good practical support for the school and are pleased to be promptly informed if their children are experiencing particular problems. They are less satisfied, however, with the routine information provided about their children's academic progress. Inspectors agree with these concerns. Although parents receive one annual report and several interim progress checks, the information provided does not always give parents a clear idea of their child's progress or indicate how students can improve their work. Targets are not consistently provided and, when they are, they are often too vague for progress to be measurable. The school does, however, go out of its way to seek parents' views and issues annual questionnaires to canvass their opinion. Parents are very pleased with the approachability of staff and the way in which their ideas and suggestions are often incorporated into plans for the future.
38. Links with the local community are good. Students regularly take part in local and national events, such as the mayor's concert and the magistrates' debating competition. There are also good links with the local police and youth service, and extensive links with local businesses support the Year 11 work experience programme.
39. The school works in very close harmony and co-operation with local schools and colleges. There are good links with contributory primary schools and these are used to good effect. Students' transfer into secondary education is preceded by numerous visits by teachers of subjects such as science and physical education. The activities undertaken help students at primary schools to become familiar with their new teachers and this helps to ensure that incoming Year 7 students settle quickly once they arrive. There has been close co-operation between the school and the two other secondary schools in Abingdon to put together a joint bid for specialist schools status. Funding targets have been reached to support the bid, which, if successful, would lead to the school becoming a specialist arts and media college and bring many additional resources to the school and its community.

40. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has close contact with parents to keep them informed of all support programmes that are available. Many parents have sent letters of thanks to the SENCO for the care and attention that their children receive.

Sixth Form

41. All members of the Abingdon 16-19 consortium work together to provide a well co-ordinated programme of courses for students and enhanced professional opportunities for members of staff. Students indicate that the range of advanced, intermediate and foundation courses suits their interests and talents well. Students have access to a wide range of information about further and higher education and induction procedures are good. The consortium is trying to strengthen links further with the appointment of an enrichment co-ordinator and hopes to introduce a programme of shared sporting and social events. Good links with Oxford Brookes University are used to familiarise students with higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The headteacher gives the school good direction. The school's leadership, including the governors, have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision, much of which is gained from listening to the views of the school's users. The management of the school is satisfactory, it has set about tackling some key weaknesses but lacks rigour in ensuring that policies and best practice are implemented consistently by all teachers. Overall leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher gives the school clear direction .
- Governors have an effective committee structure and conduct business efficiently.
- Procedures for financial planning and monitoring are very effective.
- The management of the school has set about tackling key weaknesses such as homework and the under-performance in certain subjects.
- The sixth form is led very effectively and managed well.
- Management at senior and departmental level has lacked rigour in ensuring that policies and best practice are implemented consistently by all teachers.
- Governors are not always rigorous enough in ensuring that the school completely fulfils its statutory duties in updating policies and addressing the need for a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

42. The governing body is well organised and benefits from firm direction from its chairman who ensures a businesslike approach through an effective committee structure, where individual governors work hard in support of the school. Senior staff work well with governors ensuring that they have a satisfactory grasp of strengths and weaknesses, particularly in the school's examination results. Governors are able to rely on twice-termly reports on the school's progress from the headteacher. These reports contain relatively little monitoring information on the quality of provision and so governors are less aware of strengths and weaknesses here. It has sometimes taken too long for actions to improve weak performance to have an impact. Governors provide good support to the headteacher. They play a helpful part in shaping the future direction of the school. While they are generally effective in ensuring that policies and practices are regularly reviewed, governors acknowledge that their policy on provision of collective worship does not meet statutory requirements, and some policies are in need of updating. Their performance management policy is appropriate and the review of the headteacher's performance is effectively done.

43. The headteacher shows clear vision and sense of purpose based on strongly held and widely respected principles. He has high aspirations for the school and for the achievement of the full range of students who attend. He and his senior team work effectively to ensure that practice and policy relating to teaching and learning are systematically reviewed. The recommendations from these reviews are sometimes carried forward into school policy, for instance in relation to homework strategy. In the majority of cases however it is left to individual managers to decide on whether or how to implement recommended practice. This leads to some inconsistencies in the rate of improvement across the school.
44. The four-year development plan reflects well the school's ongoing priorities, with a clear focus on students' achievement, on teaching quality and on students' learning skills and motivation. While the plan is updated annually and is presented in an accessible single-sheet A3 format, it is not fully adequate as an operational plan and neither are the department plans. They lack the detail which allows improvements to be secured and monitored. Most departments have recently undertaken an audit of their current strengths and weaknesses but these analyses do not feed adequately into the development plans. Not all departments have completed these audits despite deadlines.
45. There has been a significant improvement recently in the availability and management, at senior level, of data on individual students' performance. Although these data are being well used in science, it has not yet been made clear how key staff should use them to identify targets for individual students or where improvements in teaching or the curriculum are needed.
46. Many heads of department display good or very good leadership and management. Particularly in ICT, history, geography, art and design and music, they have helped create very effective teams and provide very good role models for their colleagues. The performance management of heads of department has improved although not all reviews have been conducted within the required timescale. Performance review of teachers generally remains inadequately related to the school's priorities or to a programme of professional development. There has been an unpreparedness by managers, at all levels, to give judgements about unsatisfactory performance on the rare occasions when this has been the case. As a result, identified weaknesses have not been resolved swiftly enough. However, staff work well together and are generally well motivated in playing their part in the school's determination to raise students' standards across the curriculum.
47. Senior staff have given insufficient focus to the monitoring of quality of teaching over the past year due to the workload stemming from a range of other initiatives and to their commitment to management functions which are an inappropriate use of their time.
48. The SENCO has a clear vision of support for learning and the team of teachers and teaching assistants co-operate well and share good practice. A recently appointed governor is taking a keen interest in developing special needs provision. However, whilst the school is effective in its provision for students with special needs, the written policy document is long out of date: a new draft document in line with the new code is only just being presented to the governors for their consideration.
49. The school makes exceptionally good provision for experienced teachers new to the school and for newly qualified teachers. All recent appointees value the support and help they are given within departments and by other colleagues. Staff benefit significantly from established links with Oxford University in training potential teachers, because their professional development is especially widened from extensive mentor training. The effect of professional development across subjects, however, is inconsistent in improving the quality of teaching and learning, because subject-specific training is dependent upon a department budget and the skill of heads of subject in identifying training priorities.

50. The school has very effective procedures for planning and monitoring its income and expenditure. Recent changes in funding arrangements for schools have impacted adversely on the school's budget, but increases in recruitment of students into the sixth form and Year 7, along with careful planning, have offset income reductions and prevented the school from making large cuts in provision. The school's accounts and financial procedures have not, however, been formally audited since 1997. In its planning, the school actively seeks best value, especially by considering how its own education provision can complement that available in other schools locally. Measurement of the school's academic performance, however, needs to consider national as well as local comparisons.
51. The school's unit costs were around the average for schools in shire counties in 2002-3. Given the good achievement and good quality of education the school provides for students from broadly favourable social and economic circumstances, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3125747	Balance from previous year	86825
Total expenditure	3120359	Balance carried forward to the next	5388
Expenditure per student	2949		

Sixth Form

52. The sixth form is led very effectively. Although the partnership arrangements with three other schools and a college are now well established, there is still a very clear vision about how provision can further improve, including a broadening of enrichment activities and the need for more support for key skills such as learning with ICT. Sixth-form provision is well managed, despite the challenges of co-ordinating provision across four institutions. The quality of courses in all schools is monitored by success rate indicators which incorporate exam results and rates of retention of students on courses, and this data helps subjects evaluate the quality of their work, though there is no system in place for closer monitoring of lessons. Financial arrangements for involvement in the partnership are clear and well understood; in terms of the very broad range of choices made available to them the sixth-form students get very good value from the school's commitment to the partnership.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' personal reading is well developed.
 - Writing for a variety of purposes is good.
 - There is good care for special needs students and low attainers.
 - Extra-curricular activities involve a considerable number of students.
 - Students' work is insufficiently closely assessed according to national criteria; students do not know the standard of their work well enough to be able to improve.
 - Systems for monitoring and improving teaching and sharing good practice are not sufficiently well developed.
53. Overall standards in English are average in comparison with all schools. Attainment by the end of Year 9, as measured by students' average points scores in the 2003 national tests, was below average, although the proportion of students who scored Level 5 and above in those tests was broadly average. In the national tests, students have attained less well in English than in mathematics and science since the last inspection. They write well for different purposes under free conditions but do not analyse language closely enough or work sufficiently to time limits to succeed in the tests. At GCSE, the results are average overall; they were better than mathematics and similar to science in this respect in 2002. At the time of the last inspection, GCSE results were above average. Almost all students take English literature at GCSE, in which the results are only slightly below those in English. In Years 7 to 11 girls attain more highly than boys to the same extent as is found nationally. On entry to the school students are average, and they reach an average standard at GCSE, with the result that their overall achievement is satisfactory.
54. The standards seen during the inspection were average. Some students spoke confidently and listened attentively; others required prompting by their teachers to contribute in lessons. Variations in the progress made by students between teaching groups were not linked entirely to students' abilities. Lower ability students were seen making good progress in their study of poems from other cultures.
55. Students' progress is satisfactory in English. Virtually all the teaching seen was satisfactory or better, with a few very good lessons. Students learned well about the media of advertising and produced convincing and catchy slogans. Year 7 students concentrated very well in their induction lesson to the learning resource centre (LRC) and some commented intelligently on their reading. Students learn better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Until they reach the end of Year 9, students do not know how well they are doing in English, in comparison to what is expected nationally. With a few exceptions, teachers' lesson aims are generally not made clear to students; this inhibits learning. Teachers do not plan specifically to ensure progression. Very good teaching was seen with some low ability Year 11 students. Basic skills are taught well to the least able for the Entry Level Certificate; this course enables the lowest attaining students to gain an accredited qualification before leaving school.

56. Students develop their reading well through the schemes of work designed to be used in the LRC. Here there is very good team teaching. Reading is also well promoted through class libraries and silent reading at the start of lessons. While some opportunities for links with drama have been taken to improve students' speaking and listening, these are not developed far enough. Drama is well taught, but there are insufficient opportunities to explore and exchange ideas orally in English. Students write well for a range of purposes, particularly in Years 10 and 11. They use computers well for wordprocessing, presentations and literature-related software. The full curriculum is in place for English and the study of media within English is good.
57. Considerable care is taken for students with special needs, whose individual requirements are well recognised and catered for by teachers' planning.
58. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory but uneven. A lack of rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning means that the quality and usefulness of assessment is inconsistent. Not all teachers make effective use of National Curriculum level information to show pupils what they need to do to improve, although the best practice in the department is very good. The recent introduction of the literacy strategy within English is a promising development which is very late in being implemented. The department is now well resourced and benefits from being close to the LRC. Accommodation is good, with attractive displays in rooms and corridors.
59. Overall, the subject has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, but there has been insufficient progress on the issue of the quality and use of assessment in Years 7 to 9.
60. There are plentiful opportunities for enhancement of English available to students. These include poetry performances, playwriting and performing, theatre trips and visiting authors. Students have had national success in the schools' Carnegie competition.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

61. Literacy has been well developed across the curriculum. The summer school run for chosen Year 7 students contributes well to their literacy and to their self-esteem. Students listen and speak well in music and modern foreign languages, but not in mathematics; they write well in design and technology and history. Key words are taught in most subjects. Students annotate their work well in art and design and design and technology.

French, German and Spanish

Provision in French, German and Spanish is **satisfactory** overall with many good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are beginning to show a marked improvement.
 - The school offers a choice of three languages and large numbers of students opt to study more than one language.
 - Teachers have a good command of the languages they teach.
 - Accommodation is good, and equipment, including ICT equipment, is very good.
 - Some students have a low regard for language learning.
 - Numbers opting to study languages in the sixth form are low.
62. Standards are satisfactory overall. Over Years 7 to 9 in French, German and Spanish achievement is satisfactory. Students are reaching standards in line with national expectations.
 63. At GCSE, results in French and German have been well below national averages since the last inspection. However, in 2003 they showed a marked upturn: the percentage of students

reaching grades A*-C more than doubled in German and almost doubled in French. The gap between boys' and girls' standards, noted at the last inspection, has narrowed and is smaller than that found nationally. Students with special educational needs have the opportunity to access languages but the standards they reach are variable. Some of the highest attaining students are not given sufficiently demanding work and some are not reaching as high grades as they should. In the sixth form, standards in German are very good and in French good. However, numbers are too small for valid comparisons.

64. In the lessons seen during the inspection, and on the evidence from students' books and from discussions with students, achievement overall is satisfactory although there is wide variation between different classes and different teachers. Overall achievement is better in German than in French based on students' capabilities.
65. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall at both key stages. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9 in German; there is none in French or Spanish and none in Years 10 and 11 in German. However, the picture is variable and many lessons contain very good, as well as some unsatisfactory, features.
66. The best lessons have a range of activities and challenging pace. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and use it to good effect to provide a model for students and to raise the status of the language as a natural, living means of communication. Appropriate work is provided for high attainers and for students with special educational needs. Good use is made of computers, tape recorders, overhead projectors, games, role-play and competition, and physical actions reinforce learning and ensure the involvement of all students. Teachers make their objectives clear and enable students to feel a sense of progress as they move towards them. Students respond well to the warmth and encouragement of their teachers.
67. In other lessons objectives are not always clear, or are stated and then disregarded. There is a preponderance of English so that the use of a foreign language for genuine communication is lost; work is not marked in a way which enables students to improve, pace is sometimes leisurely and students with special educational needs are not adequately supported. Teachers work hard but their input is not matched by that of students who daydream, chat amongst themselves and 'switch off'.
68. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The gap between boys' and girls' performance has narrowed (although lower sets still sometimes contain more boys than girls). Assessment arrangements are better and assessment data is now used to help teachers plan. Action has been taken to improve teaching and learning: the high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching (one third) has been almost eliminated. Teamwork and co-operation between teachers are now stronger.
69. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader knows the department's strengths and weaknesses. She is an enthusiastic practitioner with a clear vision and an awareness of the issues facing modern foreign languages nationally. Monitoring of other staff takes place but is sometimes ad hoc and the sharing of good practice needs to be more formally embedded in day-to-day work. Accommodation is very good and there is a good supply of textbooks which students can take home for personal use. However there are only a few foreign language books in the LRC and there are no magazines, tapes or videos. This limits the students' opportunities for independent work and lowers the subject's profile in the school. The low numbers opting for language post-16 also reflect the low status of these subjects.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory** because of weaknesses in provision in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- Standards are improving and by the end of Year 9 increasing numbers of students attain the higher levels.
- The attentiveness of students is generally good.
- There is underachievement at GCSE for many students.
- Marking is inconsistent and is insufficiently rigorous.
- The departmental development plan lacks precision.

Commentary

70. Standards achieved in national tests at the end of Year 9 are consistently above national averages. Results at Level 6 and above in 2002 were particularly good (58 per cent as against 45 per cent nationally); in 2003 test results were also above average and more Levels 7 and 8 were obtained. In comparison to similar schools achievement of higher attainers is good and is satisfactory for other students. Boys tend to perform better than girls.
71. GCSE results for 2003 show a small improvement over 2002, both for grades A*-C and in average points scores. Higher-attaining students sustain good progress, many others underachieve, their performance in mathematics being lower than in their other subjects, though nearly all who enter the examination do reach at least grade G standard. Comparisons of performance from Year 7 to Year 11 show achievement to be unsatisfactory.
72. Teaching and learning up to the end of Year 9 are good. Apart from one poor lesson there was clear planning, accurate exposition, and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is appropriately applied. Students are encouraged yet challenged and learning promoted, as in a very good Year 7 lesson on sequences that led naturally to basic algebraic notation. Suitable notes are usually given though some teachers do not ensure students write down clear exemplars. Marking of exercise books is, however, insufficiently rigorous, and policy inconsistently applied. Use of stars or smiley faces, which lead to commendations, is laudable but overdone, and should not be a substitute for clear grading of the quality of work. There is little evidence that students re-do incorrect work or finish previously incomplete tasks.
73. This lack of consolidation results in much unsatisfactory teaching and learning up to the end of Year 11. Whilst students in upper sets do progress satisfactorily and have sound understanding, for example of quadratics, circle properties and cumulative frequency, many students in other classes do not achieve the standards of which they are capable. Expectations are not high enough, work is pitched at unsuitable levels, and students lose motivation. Their weaknesses in prior knowledge markedly impair progress. Their recall of information is noticeably weak. Too much time is spent reviewing basic concepts, including numeracy, so other topics may receive superficial coverage only. There is limited in-depth marking of students' work.
74. Many students, particularly in the lower years, are attentive and responsive, work well in class and share good relationships with teachers. Suitable intervention strategies are needed to re-motivate students who disengage. Some good quality Year 11 coursework involving ICT was seen during the inspection, as was some good support for a student with special educational needs. Homework has in the past been inconsistently done, but signs of improvement are evident. The repetitious use of key objective tests needs reviewing – all taking the same test is inappropriate to the needs of many.
75. Departmental leadership and management are satisfactory, though the development plan requires more precision. Staff undertake mutual lesson observations and participate in training programmes. Support for new colleagues is mostly good. Schemes of work are based upon commercial packages and need to be more directly linked to local

circumstances. There are detailed records of student progression but the overall effectiveness of marking and assessment is unsatisfactory. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory: standards have improved between Years 7 to 9, but other features have changed little. More rigour is needed.

Mathematics across the curriculum

76. There is a sharp contrast between numeric and mental skills of students in Years 7 to 9 and those in Years 10 and 11. Younger students benefit from the National Numeracy Strategy, and are confident in dealing with basic number operations, money, measurement and diagrammatic work. Many older students are slow to recall number facts and are unable to perform non-calculator tasks readily, such as simple long multiplications or multiplying and dividing by powers of ten.
77. There is no numeracy policy across subjects, though co-operation between departments takes place and some subjects have taken a lead role in promoting numeracy in the curriculum. Graphical use is generally satisfactory, as in science and geography. Measurement and geometric construction were of sound standard in design and technology. Spreadsheets and associated graphs are used in ICT, and some interesting work on time spans occurs in history.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Above average standards are achieved.
- Students' have high quality practical skills.
- Meticulous analyses of test and examination results help to judge the department's performance.
- Students' investigative skills are not developed fully during class experiments.
- Classroom observations need to sharply focus upon aspects of teaching that enrich learning.
- When teachers mark books they do not all highlight progress and what needs to be improved.
- Well-planned learning objectives are not always shared with students.

Commentary

78. In recent years, Year 9 test results have usually been above average when compared with all schools. In 2003, results were even better at the expected Level 5 and above. They significantly increased at the higher Levels 6 and 7; twice as many students achieved Level 7 as in the previous year, when results were broadly in line with the, then, national average. Girls' and boys' performances at Level 6 and above were similar. In 2003, GCSE results at grades A*-C in the double science award markedly improved on the previous year when they had been average. A good number studied biology, chemistry and physics separately and achieved very good results in all three subjects. Physics and chemistry had notable successes at grade A and almost all studying biology gained A*-C grades. In single science, GCSE results in 2003 represented mostly good achievement for the small number of pupils entered.
79. Current standards in these early weeks of Year 9 are, overall, above average. This represents good achievement for many students in relation to when they started at the school, including those with special educational needs. The actual rate of progress is strongly linked to how deeply teachers expect students to understand ideas. They develop number skills as they learn science, although middle attainers need more practice. New practical skills are learnt quickly and well because of their teachers' expertise. Year 9 competently measured acidity in different solutions using computer probes and chemical

indicators when learning more about neutralisation. However, class experiments are too structured and guided by teachers which limits students' understanding about experimental methods. There is scope for more independent investigative work in Years 7 to 9.

80. Standards in the current Year 11 are average and progress has been satisfactory. In Year 10, on the other hand, standards are above average with noticeable features that are well above, for example in technically explaining de-magnetism at an advanced level. Achievement overall is good. Low attainers are supported well in their learning about life processes because of their teachers' helpful comments on their work. They can plan a fair test for experiments because of thorough guidance. Year 11 coursework showed that all know the stages through an investigation, for instance about resistance in putty to electrical current. Several, however, have difficulty in technically explaining flaws and anomalies in results and evaluating conclusions. Analyses rarely refer to fundamental ideas about science. The very highest attaining students deftly interpret results and draw scientific conclusions, but the majority need to increase the sophistication of observations and raise the standard of evaluations in class work. Books show insufficient application of ideas by students.
81. The quality of teaching is good overall. It ranges from very good to satisfactory. This is reflected in the quality of students' learning. A well-planned practical session, finding out how food stains can be removed, led low attainers in Year 10 to make large leaps in their learning about enzymes. Adept questioning drew out their own suggestions about what might cause the disappearance, forcing them to think through and explain their ideas. Very good teaching encouraged high standards in a chemistry lesson by sharing learning objectives with students, so that they clearly understood the direction of the lesson. This led to very close rapport between them and a confidence in their capabilities to understand the chemistry of nutrients.
82. Some aspects of the teaching impoverish learning: dull planning, omission of imaginative, constructive beginning and ending of lesson and poor quality marking which is inconsistent, rarely focuses upon key learning points or makes comments which sharply raise standards. The best practice gives students 'cause for thought' in encouraging further progress. Teachers do not routinely check that such comments have been acted upon. Although students are placed in sets, teaching tends to be pitched at the same level for everyone in the set, although some students may need different pace or materials.
83. Leadership and management are good. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, most notably in improved standards, with higher levels achieved in national tests and examinations. Technical support is now very good and contributes a great deal to students' high quality practical skills. There is increasingly sophisticated use of information to track individual students' progress, although their targets do not sharply focus on learning particular aspects of science and teachers do not use this information enough when planning lessons. The monitoring of teaching and learning through classroom observations and analysis of class books needs to be improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are able to use their ICT skills independently and have very positive attitudes for the subject.
- There are above average results at GCSE.
- There is a whole-school commitment to improving the use of ICT; resources are good and these resources are mostly used very effectively.
- The progress of those students in Years 10 and 11 who do not take GCSE in ICT is not tracked; there is insufficient assessment of ICT work undertaken in other subjects
- Assessment procedures need to be more effective in diagnosing students' strengths and helping them to recognise and overcome their weaknesses.

Commentary

84. Overall standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average. The curriculum is well planned and all students have good basic skills. They are competent in communicating information using wordprocessing and desktop publishing. Students enjoy personalising their work by using drawing and presentation programs to change and add to Clipart. Students are able to use spreadsheets and create graphs. They have designed databases, which involved entering field names with different lengths and data types. Teachers assessed that by the end of Year 9 in 2003, 56.2 per cent of students will achieve Level 5 and above which is below average and below the school's targets. There are clear indications that standards are improving; for example, the time allocation for students in Years 7 and 8 has doubled giving a wider curriculum and more opportunity for continuity.
85. Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11, where the majority follow a course in GCSE and results are above the national average. A significant number of students also follow a course in business studies, which has a strong ICT element. Students express their enjoyment of the GCSE course and in lessons show enthusiasm and the ability to work independently. They give constructive criticism to others and to evaluate their own work. Teachers encourage students to discuss the use of ICT in society and give them good opportunities to relate ICT applications to the real world. The progress of those students who do not follow ICT or business GCSE courses is not tracked, although sampling of their work by teachers shows the experiences they are given have suitable breadth.
86. Teaching in ICT lessons is good overall and ranges from satisfactory to very good. Lessons are well structured to move students independently through increasingly demanding tasks. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards and other visual material in lessons. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and the curriculum and this, together with the very good relationships with students, results in students making good progress and achieving well. Teachers ensure that they give one-to-one support to students with special educational needs. Students are interested in their work and concentrate well during lessons. They were able to explain confidently what they had learned and how this related to their previous work. Any problem with equipment which might affect the lesson is efficiently sorted out by the technicians. Assessment is satisfactory and is carried out consistently. Very good use is made of oral discussion in lessons to help students to improve their work.
87. Leadership is good and there are well-defined lines of responsibility. There is a drive for improvement and staff share a common purpose. The team understand their own and others' roles well, relationships are very good and there is a respect for each other's contributions. There is constant evaluation leading to improvement with frequent team meetings. Staff in the school have all received the necessary New Opportunities Fund

training and there is training available to help them make full use of their laptops. All staff are given support and advice when it is needed.

88. Overall, the ICT provision supports learning well. There is ready access to computers throughout the school. The recent purchase of wireless laptop computers and the improved resources generally ensures that there is the opportunity for students in large groups to work individually.
89. There has been a good improvement since the last inspection and all those in the department are committed to ensuring that ICT is a vital learning tool in the school. Standards are satisfactory overall and students achieve well, especially those taking GCSE. The school has focused on the development of ICT to improve students' learning and has incorporated the local education authority's community network, provided laptops for teachers and built a wireless network to improve efficiency and reduce stress.

ICT across the curriculum

90. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. The school has focused on the development of ICT to improve student achievement. However, while the use of ICT is evident in the work of some departments, such as design and technology and music, in others it is still in the process of being developed.
91. In French, students are able to work independently at a number of tasks to develop writing skills and enlarge vocabulary. The measurement and control elements of ICT take place in science and design and technology. For example, there is very effective use of ICT in science to clarify classification of materials using pH probes. The history department has an excellent website, but it is underused, although students know about it. Specific software is used in English, mathematics and business studies to raise standards.
92. There are good examples of the use of ICT, especially wordprocessing and presentation software, for GCSE coursework, where students are able to use their ICT independently. The Internet is used well for research and students are able to refine their searches to find the appropriate information. ICT has contributed to the improvement of GCSE results in German.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good lesson planning is shared with students, giving them clear notions of what they will learn and how.
- There is a predominance of good quality teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- There is very good leadership and management of the highly committed subject team, which has produced very good improvement since the last inspection.
- There is an uneven and generally inadequate contribution of ICT to students' learning in Years 7 to 9.
- There is insufficient attention to the needs of the highest attaining students in some lessons in Years 7 and 8.

Commentary

93. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 showed a very good improvement over recent years but were still below the national average. Teachers' assessment of students' performance at the end of Year 9 continues to be below the national expectation.
94. By the end of Year 9, students' knowledge about places, their ability to interpret maps and diagrams, their understanding of concepts and processes and their use of correct terminology to describe them are now average. Their literacy skills are at least adequate for them to make sense of the course. Their speaking and listening skills are good. They use mathematical skills to draw accurate and meaningful graphs. In Years 7 and 8, lower and average attainers make good progress while higher attainers do not always make the progress they might. By the end of Year 11, students' progress in further developing their skills, knowledge and understanding is satisfactory. They have more opportunities at this stage to use computers to support their learning and the standards they achieve, for instance in information retrieval, are satisfactory.
95. In all years, the good teaching is knowledgeable, confident, enthusiastic and well planned. In most lessons, there is real flair and inventiveness. Very good time management holds students' attention well. Pace is fast and the level of challenge and expectations high. There is good participation by students in response to teachers' skilful questioning and the opportunities they give students to make longer contributions. High standards of behaviour are achieved because teachers ensure that ground rules are understood and enforced. The use of seating plans makes an effective contribution. Homework is well designed. The needs of students with special educational needs are understood and well responded to. There has been too much variability in the approach to marking and assessment but the new assessment strategy is generating the required improvement. A small minority of lessons takes place away from the subject base and this can hamper the effectiveness of their resourcing.
96. Leadership and management of the subject are both very good. The head of department has vision, determination and energy and provides a very good role model. This ensures good teamwork and all teachers make a good contribution to the development of the subject. There is a clear understanding of what still needs improving although the subject development plan does not reflect this well.
97. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. With the very good leadership and good teaching, the subject is attracting a more even spread of students to the GCSE course. These factors together are ensuring that the department has the capacity to improve results in future years.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have improved significantly in recent years.
- The best teaching is of a very high quality and lesson planning is generally very good.
- The head of department provides clear and firm leadership.
- There is a need for sharper clarification of students' individual targets.
- Some teaching in Years 7 to 9 needs greater pace and challenge.
- Students should be encouraged to make more use of the department's excellent website.

Commentary

98. Results at GCSE have improved significantly in recent years and students are now attaining results above the national average with nearly two-thirds achieving a C grade or better in 2003 and a creditable 30 per cent gaining an A* or A. Standards are above average and students achieve well by Year 11. Teacher assessments, observation of lessons and the quality of students' work indicate that standards are in line with national averages by the end of Year 9 and students' achievement between Years 7 and 9 is satisfactory. By Year 9, students understand crucial historical concepts, like causation and bias and are developing the skill of interpreting evidence.
99. Teaching is satisfactory over Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The best teaching is characterised by enthusiasm and authority supported by good planning and excellent subject knowledge. This led, for example, to a lively debate in a Year 11 class on the true role of Nelson Mandela in South Africa: meanwhile concepts such as bias and causation were effectively introduced in two Year 8 classes on the problems of Henry VII. Students are engaged in most lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and find them stimulating and challenging. Teachers care about their students and their subject and are committed to improvement. Homework is normally relevant and reinforces class-work. Marking is generally purposeful with helpful, constructive comments. The department has a well-developed assessment system: in Years 7 to 9 students complete five major assignments, addressing different historical skills. Appropriate work was available for two statemented students working with an efficient classroom assistant.
100. Although no unsatisfactory teaching was observed, in some lessons in Years 7 to 9 there was room for greater pace and challenge. This could be achieved by more collaborative learning, greater thought about questioning and a readiness to confront immediately some occasional silly behaviour.
101. Teachers are clear about the individual targets of students and the standards reached previously; students themselves are much less certain about these. A more robust system of determining targets in consultation with students, as well as what needs to be done to achieve them, should be put in place. The department has developed an exciting website which deserves wider dissemination amongst students and parents.
102. Leadership and management of the subject is good. The head of department is an impressive role model for staff and students. A meticulous planner, he is committed to educational research and has encouraged an admirable use of both primary and secondary sources in the department. Resources are well used in the department and there is good deployment of staff who form an effective team. There is a strong programme of historical visits, from a Year 7 tour of Warwick Castle to annual visits abroad which have included Berlin, Prague, St Petersburg and Greece: a large number of students participate in and appreciate these opportunities. The subject has made good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching has improved, as have results. There is now no unsatisfactory teaching between Years 7 and 9. Greater use is being made of ICT and the department is in a good position to build further on this.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The GCSE results are above the national average.

- The time allocation for the sixth form is well below the recommendation of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus.
- There is insufficient use of assessment to raise standards.
- The monitoring and evaluation of learning to raise achievement needs improvement

Commentary

103. Approximately ten per cent of Year 11 students take the GCSE course and results are significantly above the national average.
104. Standards of knowledge and understanding at Year 9 and Year 11 are broadly in line with the expectations of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus. The achievement of the majority of students is satisfactory. Boys and girls achieve broadly similar standards but generally girls take more care with the presentation of written work. It is not possible to comment on the standards in the sixth form as the syllabus is addressed by visiting speakers, but time allocation for this is very low. Most students respond positively to the well-prepared lessons. They sustain interest because of the variety of tasks and the good pace of lessons. The attention to oral and group work involves them as active learners when they use their thinking skills in a variety of ways. In class, support for students with special educational needs enables them to succeed. Personal study is regularly set and helps to consolidate and extend learning. Opportunities to wordprocess and use commercial software and the Internet for research, motivate students to work hard. Assessment is developing but there are not tasks for every unit to assess knowledge and understanding so students do not know precisely what it is that they need to do to improve their work.
105. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the lessons observed it was always satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan and prepare lessons well. However there is not a system to enable best practice to be shared. The same emphasis is not given to writing as to speaking and listening. There is a lack of emphasis on the basics such as capital letters, full stops, noun and verb match and common spellings and few opportunities for extended writing. Teachers take every opportunity to develop students' self-worth by valuing their efforts and respecting their views. The Quest course for Years 10 and 11 places significant emphasis on developing interpersonal skills. There are very good opportunities for reflection on the meaning and purpose of life. The study of aspects of different world religions increases students' cultural awareness and understanding of how belief influences lifestyles. The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students.
106. The department has maintained the satisfactory teaching and the standards seen at the last inspection.
107. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the department works well together. Monitoring and evaluation have focused on teaching but not yet sufficiently on how learning can be more effective.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination performance is consistently above the national average.
- Good standards of work are seen in all aspects of the subject.

- There is good teaching, and relationships are strong and a purposeful working atmosphere is maintained.
- There is not enough control technology in Year 7 to Year 9, and more use of computer-aided design packages could further improve graphical presentation.

Commentary

108. Standards of work in Year 9 are above average. From average attainment on entry, students make good progress from Year 7 to 9, and achieve well over this period of time. Girls usually produce a better standard of work, particularly in their design folders. Projects have very good presentational skills, use colour appropriately and have good evaluations linked to original design briefs. Where the work does not meet high standards it is mainly due to poorer presentational skills, drawings out of proportion, work not completed and spelling errors. Achievement of special educational needs students is good. Practical work is of a good standard.
109. Standards of work in Year 11 are above average overall with boys performing particularly well in the 2002 GCSE examinations. In 2002 the different design and technology subjects experienced varied success with resistant materials well above the national average. The good performance continued in 2003 with textiles and food technology the better performers at A*-C grades. All students achieve success at A*-E grades including lower attaining students who achieve particularly well in this subject.
110. Students' literacy skills are well supported by word banks and technical vocabulary on display. Numeracy skills are satisfactory and ICT is appropriately used in students' work.
111. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and never less than satisfactory. In the better lessons learning is accelerated and good progress made because lessons are well planned, have a clear focus, use a mix of activities and have good student management. Strategies, including short-term targets, marking linked to coursework criteria and insistence on good quality work have helped to raise standards in this department. Where lessons are satisfactory there is some lack of pace and weaker time management issues, with occasionally students off task.
112. The department is well led and managed. Documentation is thorough and stored electronically enabling teaching staff to access information both in school and at home. The curriculum meets statutory requirements but control technology needs a wider application in Years 7 to 9. The use of computer-aided design packages would improve graphical skills further throughout the curriculum. A very good feature of the management of the department is analysis of data and using this information to plan for further improvements. Assessment procedures are good and marking, including target setting, is helpful. Monitoring of teaching and learning is on an informal basis which could be more effective if conducted more formally.
113. Accommodation is good in food and textiles and satisfactory in resistant materials and graphics, where the workshops are outdated and the bench tops need refurbishment. Resources are good, including ICT facilities, in all areas. Display of work is very good in all areas and supports learning.
114. Improvement since the last inspection includes improved examination performance for lower attaining students, increased ICT resources contributing to higher standards, and a marking scheme linked to National Curriculum levels.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department has created a highly positive working environment.
- Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and are very well-informed.
- Teachers make very good use of a wide variety of teaching strategies.
- Students apply themselves readily to the set tasks and make very good progress.
- The narrowness of the current curriculum that places too much emphasis on drawing, painting and craft activities: there is not enough use of modern technology, photography and ICT.
- Some class sizes are too large for the available studio space.

Commentary

115. Students' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is broadly in line with national expectations. At the end of Year 9 in 2002, attainment was well above the national average with girls' attainment being higher than boys'. In 2003 there was a significant improvement in these figures over those for the previous year. By the end of Year 9, attainment was well above the national average. Achievement, from entry at the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 9 therefore, is very good and students make very good progress. In the 2002 GCSE examination in art and design the proportion of students achieving the highest grades A*-C was well above the national average. In 2003, however, there was a decline in the number of boys that attained the highest grades while the number of girls that attained grades A*-C remained the same. All students entered for the GCSE examination were successful, which clearly shows that the lower attaining students are also achieving well. Attainment by these students was much better in art and design than in all school subjects that they took in the 2003 GCSE examinations. Students make very good progress from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 11.
116. During the inspection, students in Years 7, 8 and 9 were seen to work in a very disciplined manner, in spite of overcrowding due to large numbers in the available studio space. Year 7 students obviously enjoy the subject and were working well to develop their basic skills in drawing and painting. Students in Year 8 applied themselves readily to the tasks that had been set by their teacher and produced very good drawn studies in two dimensions. By Year 9 students have developed appropriate skills in the use of a variety of different media and materials and are capable of working independently of their teachers. Students are making very good progress from entry in Year 7 to the end of Year 9. Attainment by girls remains slightly higher than that of boys and students with special educational needs are also making good progress. Achievement from entry in Year 7 through to the end of Year 9 is very good.
117. Students in Year 10 have acquired the capacity for carrying out independent research that takes the form of drawings, paintings and images collected from a variety of different sources and stored in their visual diaries. This visual information is subsequently developed into paintings or three-dimensional objects that are completed in school. Year 11 students are producing interesting art and design objects that show thorough understanding of the design process, from initial research studies through to the production of the finished object. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is well above national expectations, and achievement from the end of Year 9 through to the end of Year 11 is very good. Students with special educational needs are very well integrated into teaching groups and are expected to work to the best of their abilities. They are very well supported and make good progress.

118. Teaching ranges from good to very good and is very good overall. Teachers display great commitment to their students and are successful in communicating their own enthusiasm for art as an exciting means of conveying ideas and feelings to others. Teachers are very well informed, possess good subject knowledge and have very good relationships with their students. Planning and organisation are of a particularly high quality and, as a consequence, clear objectives are set for students at the start of each lesson. Teachers have very high expectations of students and relationships are very good. However, teachers could make much greater use of modern technology, such as slide projectors, videos, CDs and DVDs when introducing new themes at the start of lessons to gain students' interest and stimulate motivation.
119. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has established very good working relationships with the other members of the department. She has clear vision for the department, displays a distinct sense of purpose and has high aspirations for the department. Assessing and recording systems are in place but are lacking in rigour at present. There is a need for greater input from individual teachers to provide detailed and accurate feedback to students.
120. Accommodation and resources are good, but many class sizes are too large for the art studios, particularly in Years 7 to 9, but also in Years 10 and 11. At present the curriculum is predominantly concerned with drawing, painting and craft skills but there are few opportunities for students to develop graphic design skills utilising modern technology in the form of photography, computers, scanners, digital cameras and printers. Displays of art and design work are good at present but much more could be done to ensure that work produced by students in the art studios can be seen and enjoyed by others in the school.
121. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. The quality of work seen in Years 9 and 11 is much higher than the national average and standards continue to improve.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers' very good subject knowledge and planning of lessons are strengths.
- High standards have been achieved in GCSE examinations over time.
- Increasing number of students are choosing music in Years 10 and 11.
- The enrichment of the curriculum through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Assessment is not rigorous enough in Years 7 to 9 and because of this, students are not always clear about the levels of attainment that they reach.

Commentary

122. In the GCSE examinations the results have been above average over the past four years. In the latest examination boys have done better than girls.
123. Standards overall are average for students aged 14. The teacher assessments for summer 2002 and 2003 are average for students aged 14 with girls and boys matching the national figures. This represents good achievement because, whilst some students join the school with good musical ability, the skills of many others are underdeveloped. The double lesson once a fortnight in Year 9 constrains efforts to raise standards further because it is difficult to maintain learning from one lesson to the next. For students aged 16 standards are above average with all students making good progress and achieving well compared with their prior attainment and ability. Good and often very good teaching is a key factor in improving the

quality of learning. Many students, including a number who are talented, play instruments and sing to a high standard in the many extra-curricular activities: this enriches their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students with special educational needs participate fully in lessons. As a result, these students enjoy music and make good progress.

124. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good with some very good features in teachers' subject knowledge and planning. Lessons are well planned to involve students of all levels of capability. Homework when set generally supports the work done in lessons. There are sufficient computers for one between two and many folders contain print-outs of improvisations. Assessment is not rigorously applied and, because of this, students are not always clear about the levels of attainment that they reach.
125. Good teaching in Year 10 leads to a positive commitment from students that enables good learning to take place. Because of well-planned lessons, all students experiment with contrast and repetition. An examination of their files illustrates a good knowledge of style being developed when composing variations on a ground bass. Since teachers plan lessons with skill, students in Years 10 and 11 are exposed to a rich diet of musical experiences that promotes a high standard of learning. Good teaching in Year 11 improves students' knowledge about musical conventions. The exciting idea of taking students around the school grounds to notate bird songs brings the ideas of the composer Messiaen to life. This acts as a stimulus for group improvisations that develop into a creditable orchestral arrangement. Students enjoy music: they talk with interest about their work and confidently use ICT for composing. Instrumental and singing lessons add value that contributes to students' good achievement. Assessment is good at this stage and helps students to improve, with all students aware of their predicted grades.
126. Very good leadership inspires students to do well and enriches their personal development. Management is effective as is seen from the good examination results, the wide range of interest in music across the school and the many high quality productions, concerts and foreign trips that take place. However, departmental meetings and monitoring of teaching are not formalised. Much verbal appraisal takes place in Years 7 to 9 but assessment would be more effective if students had a better understanding of the levels against which their work is marked. There is first-class accommodation and good access to computers and keyboards. However, many xylophones and glockenspiels need repair. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good.
 - Standards are continuing to improve.
 - Extra curricular provision is very good.
 - Information available from feeder schools is sparse.
 - There is no permanent teaching base for theory work.
127. In 2002, 63 per cent of students entered for the GCSE examination gained the higher A*-C grades. These figures are above the national average. Results in 2003 continued the recent upward trend with 76 per cent achieving the higher grades. In both years the proportion of students in the cohort who sat the examination was above average. The 2003 results are the highest recorded by the department to date.
128. On the basis of the assessments undertaken by teachers, standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 are well above average. Standards seen in lessons in the present Year 9 are average overall at this early stage in the academic year. Standards are above average in extra-

curricular activities. Standards among most non-examination students in Years 10 and 11 are also average. A significant number of individual students attain above average standards in football, netball, rugby, basketball, athletics, cross-country and badminton. Although target grades for examination students in Year 11 are not as high as last year, about half the group are attaining average or above average standards at present.

129. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 is good. The school does not receive information about standards from feeder primary schools. It is clear that on entry, the ability level of the students varies considerably. Most are progressing well in the short time that they have been in school. In the extra-curricular activities observed, many students new to the school also achieved well in netball and hockey. Students with special educational needs progress as well as others.
130. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the curriculum. Class management is very effective. Practices that are carefully planned, progressive and challenging result in the students making good progress. Opportunities are provided in some lessons for students to work independently. In the best lessons teachers set different challenges for students of different ability. Students are always correctly dressed for physical activity. Relationships between teachers and students are very positive and encourage learning at all levels. Participation rates are high in sport throughout the school.
131. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The curriculum issues identified in the previous report relating to gymnastics and dance have been rectified. Other developments include higher standards among examination students, increased peer evaluation and the introduction of the Junior Sports Leaders Award in Year 10. The department does not have a permanent base for teaching theory, making delivery of this part of the examination course more difficult.
132. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are a mutually supportive team, committed, hardworking and enthusiastic. They are functioning well as a team and are mutually supportive. The department successfully re-applied for the Sportsmark Award in 2002. Extra-curricular provision is very good. During the inspection a large number of students took part enthusiastically in a variety of purposeful and well-organised activities. The additional opportunities provided for students outside normal lessons make an important contribution to the overall standards achieved and to students' personal and physical development.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Leisure and Tourism (Years 10-11)

Provision in leisure and tourism is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with the community are very good. A range of visits to relevant places of interest and the involvement of visiting speakers contribute to students' learning.
- Teaching is good. Information is shared with students at a pace that helps them with their understanding.
- The understanding of students is factual rather than analytical.
- There is not enough provision for ICT in order to extend the research opportunities available to students.

Commentary

133. The school currently offers leisure and tourism as a double GCSE in Years 10 and 11. The course was introduced only last September and so there are no previous results to report.
134. Although there are variations in the standards of students in both year groups, standards overall are well below average. This is because most students are of lower academic capability. Achievement overall is satisfactory. In Year 10, most students show interest, behave well and respond well to the teaching and guidance that they receive. The understanding of students in both groups is factual rather than analytical.
135. Teaching is good. Information is shared with students at a pace that helps them with their understanding. Questions are used effectively to encourage even the least confident students to contribute. The teacher works consistently hard to support individual students. Attendance is generally good.
136. Links with the community are very good. A range of visits to relevant places of interest and the involvement of visiting speakers contribute to students' learning. The department has identified the need to increase provision for ICT in order to extend the opportunities for research and communication available to students.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good leadership and management.
- Overall provision for the subject is very good, especially the opportunities for participation and responsible action.
- Assessment procedures are underdeveloped.
- There is insufficient monitoring of provision across subjects for Years 7, 8 and 9.

Commentary

137. It is not possible to make a judgement on the standards being reached by students. Lessons observed did not consistently have citizenship objectives as the focus and students' work and records did not contain sufficient information about standards and progress. However, students' awareness of rights and responsibilities as citizens is good, and students play an active part in decision making in the school.
138. In Years 7, 8 and 9 the school is implementing citizenship education across the curriculum and through personal, social and health education lessons. In Years 10 and 11 it is delivered through Quest and personal, social and health education. 'Off timetable days' are used successfully to cover aspects of political literacy missing from the curriculum. Year 7 was taken to Birmingham for a multicultural day. Year 8 addressed capability and disability issues with a visiting drama group of able-bodied and disabled dancers. Year 9 considered European issues. Year 10 experienced a multicultural day in an area of deprivation in Oxford. The school has international links with a school in Ghana. It intends to build its international contacts just as it has developed local and community links within the United Kingdom. In addition there are excellent opportunities for students in all years to participate and take responsible leadership. Among the opportunities that are available are sports leadership, reading and writing buddies linking Year 10 with Year 7 students. Bus safety committees ensure the journey to school is both a safe and happy one. The numbers of students involved with these activities is very high. The year councils and student council that has links with the youth forum of the district council have built student representation into the life of the school

and students' experience the democratic system at work. Through their campaigning efforts they have seen the improvement in the locker and toilet provision and been involved in the selection of catering contractors. To help students understand how behaviour can be modified the school has pioneered restorative justice to achieve a reduction in locker damage and litter dropping.

139. There was insufficient teaching during the inspection with a direct citizenship focus to be able to make a judgement about the quality of teaching. There are some good contributions to citizenship identified in some subject areas but at the moment these are not made sufficiently explicit to students.
140. Citizenship had not been introduced at the time of the last inspection.
141. Leadership and management of citizenship are the responsibility of joint co-ordinators and are good. They have mapped the provision offered within subjects, negotiated further coverage and organised 'off timetable days'. They now need to carefully monitor and evaluate the provision, especially the delivery through subjects in Years 7, 8 and 9. They have developed procedures for the assessment and recording and reporting of student achievements via the form tutor but it is too early to be able to indicate the level at which students are performing.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

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	7	71.4	94.4	42.9	37.9	34.3	38.9
Mathematics	16	50.0	74.2	18.8	34.3	20.6	31.3
Biology	7	57.1	81.6	28.6	33.2	27.1	33.2
Information and communication technology	6	66.7	78.2	16.7	20.6	25.0	28.5

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
Mathematics	14	100.0	93.3	71.4	52.2	104.3	84.7
English	18	100.0	98.5	61.1	43.7	93.3	84.3
Biology	17	94.1	91.6	41.2	36.3	78.8	74.1
Art	20	100.0	96.1	80.0	48.7	103.0	85.1
Design and technology	8	100.0	95.3	87.5	35.5	105.0	76.5
History	10	100.0	97.1	80.0	41.0	98.0	81.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

The inspection focus was on English language but literature, currently offered only in Year 12, was also sampled. Two lessons were seen. Teaching in literature is good. The students respond sensitively to texts and show good commitment, but as they have only just entered the sixth form, and some are new to the school, many lack confidence; however, the standard of the limited amount of written work they have completed is above average.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above national expectations.
 - Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of their students and ensure that learning is challenging and enjoyable.
 - Students show a high commitment to the course and work very well, both collaboratively and independently, and their achievement is very good.
 - Examination data is not sufficiently well used to set performance targets for teaching groups and individual students.
142. Although the picture is complicated because of syllabus and course changes over recent years, standards are well above those nationally. In the combined English language and literature course, formerly studied at A2, almost half of all students gained grades A or B between 1999 and 2001. When students were examined in A2 literature for the first time in 2002, more than 60 per cent were awarded A-B grades. In 2003, half of the students entered for literature also gained grades A-B, as did the first group to follow the new language only course. AS results in literature have been less consistent and have shown a declining trend since 2001 when they were above average. In AS language, half of all students gained grades A-B when it was introduced in 2002, as they also did in 2003. In all examinations over the past three years, the pass rate at grades A-E has been very high.
143. Standards of work seen during the inspection, particularly in Year 13 language, are well above average. The most able students write with controlled assurance. Their coursework commentaries are perceptive and show good analytical skills, their creative and personal writing is lively and original and their language investigations are thoroughly researched and make good use of a range of ICT resources. Satirical and pastiche writing, based on a Sherlock Holmes story, shows both a mature understanding of the genre and the students' enjoyment of the task; whilst individual studies, such as an investigation into the language used in MSN Messenger chat rooms, provides a stimulating and scholarly insight into contemporary linguistics. Middle ability students show a good understanding of key concepts and terms. The structure and planning of their work are good, but their language analysis sometimes lacks close textual scrutiny and clear explanations.
144. Examination results and lesson observations show that students' achievement is very good. Because of their enthusiasm and maturity and the very good teaching, their writing, research and oral skills improve rapidly in the sixth form. A good range of theatre visits, lectures and university links also enhances learning opportunities. Relationships are excellent, students work very well, both independently and collaboratively, and they enjoy their lessons, particularly when researching topics which they have chosen themselves.
145. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations of their students and plan well to make lessons relevant, challenging and enjoyable. This was well illustrated in a Year 12 lesson on taboo language in which students

enthusiastically contributed their own examples and experiences and thereby became thoroughly involved in their own learning.

146. The leadership of this small team of teachers is very good. The head of department encourages and supports staff well, particularly in their professional development, and sets a good example of commitment and dedication. Management is good. The subject is well resourced, apart from the library provision for the large numbers taking English language, and the implementation of the two new courses has been very effective. However, the department has not yet incorporated citizenship into its planning, nor does it have a robust system for the tracking of individual students' progress or using performance data to set improvement targets.
147. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Although different courses are now taught, achievement is very good, standards are well above average, there are ample opportunities in lessons for discussions and debates and most teaching is very good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

148. Students have good language skills across the curriculum, but there is no specific provision to develop their skills in communication.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are currently above average and most students make good progress.
 - Most teachers have very good subject knowledge.
 - Opportunities for students to hypothesise, predict and explain their reasoning are too limited.
 - ICT is not used frequently enough in teaching and learning.
 - Teaching does not present enough examples of applications of mathematics from a broad range of contexts, either in lessons or in displays or other supporting material.
149. A-level examination results in 2002 were well above the national average, maintaining a rising trend after the above average results of the previous year. The 2003 A-level results were at a similar level. Results at AS level in 2002 were in line with the national average and showed a dip from the well above average results in 2001. AS level results in 2003 were lower than those in 2002.
150. A few students also take further mathematics courses and achieve well. The small numbers of students taking this course make national comparisons impossible.
151. Achievement over the examination courses for most students has been good because they work hard and have been ably supported by teachers with very good subject knowledge. Students maintain an interest and determination in their mathematical studies and retention rates are high.
152. Students currently on the AS and A-level courses build well on their knowledge and skills from previous years and reach standards which are above average. They have a good grasp of algebra and co-ordinate geometry and, in most lessons, these skills are further developed with good pace. In Year 12, however, too much time is currently being spent in some lessons repeating GCSE material that is already reasonably well grasped by the majority of students.
153. Teaching and learning are good overall, never less than satisfactory and sometimes very good. In a Year 13 mechanics lesson on friction, for example, the teacher displayed high quality questioning skills that challenged students to think clearly and articulate their views on how to

solve the problems. In a Year 12 lesson on differentiation, the teacher concluded with an effective plenary, briskly leading the students to generalise results and streamline their methods. In some lessons, students are not encouraged enough to justify their methods, explain their reasoning, predict or hypothesise and their skills in these respects are limited. Teaching rarely includes real-life applications of the techniques or strategies learned although the text books used do provide some such tasks.

154. Leadership and management are satisfactory and a strong focus is placed on promoting good teaching and learning in lessons. Too little attention is being paid, however, to the careful analysis of students' progress across the department as a whole and what needs to be done to raise further standards and achievement. The written departmental development plan is weak. The learning environment lacks stimulating displays or items of interest to mathematicians or those who might use mathematics in their careers. Resources are barely adequate and some students share books in class and to take home. Some good use is made of computers but this is not routine or frequent. Other electronic aids, such as graphical calculators, exist but are not currently being used.

Mathematics across the curriculum

155. Students' competence in mathematics is sufficiently well developed for them to manage tasks in all A-level subjects that require skills such as computation, estimation, graphical interpretation, algebraic manipulation and logical reasoning. These skills were seen being applied well in science and in design and technology, for example.

SCIENCE

Biology was the focus subject for the inspection, but physics and chemistry were also sampled. The attainment of students in physics varies from being well above the national average to below. Numbers have been low but there is a much larger Year 12 group currently. The subject is typically studied by boys but those girls following the course achieve well. Teachers' knowledge is good, but a lesson seen, while satisfactory, lacked some pace. In chemistry, all seven candidates passed A-level in 2003 with very good grades; five achieved grade A. More than twice this number chose to study chemistry in 2002, and more than half achieved A/B grades, all passed, and hence results overall were above average. Teachers have an exceptional knowledge about chemistry and an acute perception about what students need to learn to achieve the highest standards. A good lesson about polymers was pitched at challenging standards for Year 13 students and they were involved effectively in explaining the atomic structure of hydrocarbon. An excellent lesson in Year 12 resulted from highly effective planning by the teacher.

Biology

The provision for biology is **good**. Teachers with good subject knowledge teach willing students in a good environment using satisfactory resources.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.
- New laboratories provide very good accommodation.
- Overall standards are typically above that seen nationally.
- Assessment data is not used well enough to track and monitor student achievement.
- There is not enough use of ICT for monitoring of experimental work.

156. From 1998 to 2001 the average A2 points score was above the national figure. Boys' attainment is usually below average, and girls always above. Attainment in biology is similar

to that in other subjects. The average point score has typically shown a rising trend over time. Students studying for AS biology have shown an increasing pass rate.

157. The coursework of students in Year 13 shows well planned investigations on the effect of carbohydrate substrate type on yeast cell respiration. Students apply statistical techniques to results; however, some show weakness in interpreting calculated values and relating these to experimental data. Students actively participate in lessons asking questions and responding well. They showed good understanding of population dynamics terminology. Students were typically of above average A2 standard and achieved well.
158. Year 12 student portfolios are well presented, progression is logical and content appropriately challenging. There is good use of support sheets and practical and theory work are integrated. Students make good use of ICT for text and display. Work on biochemicals was of above average quality. Coursework is well presented and covers all assessment areas. Able students show good planning, consistent results - as a result of good procedural skills - good analysis and the use of ICT for text and display. Weaker students would benefit from further re-drafting of work to get higher marks. Students' mathematical skills enable them to calculate averages, percentage change in mass, construct graphs with positive and negative values and correctly construct graph lines unaided. Attainment of students matches the GCSE range in the group so achievement is good - some showing more complete conceptual understanding than others.
159. Teaching is good. Teachers have secure knowledge and use question and answer techniques well. Folders indicate logical progression using appropriately challenging materials. There is a need to ensure students are fully aware of experimental procedures and scientific principles at the outset of work and some lessons could be managed with greater pace. The curriculum is enhanced by a field trip and visits. Marking is consistent with useful feedback to students. Teachers keep their own records electronically but there is no clear overview of departmental or students' progress. There is some weakness in dissemination of data from the post-16 consortium and this makes tracking of student performance and value added judgements more difficult. Systems for assessment and tracking are in place but the effective use of assessment data is an area for development.
160. Student attendance and attitudes are good. Their approach to practical work is good; they work co-operatively with each other, completing tasks without the need for prompting. Year 13 students listen attentively, respond well to questions, and readily raise questions themselves. They are happy to enthusiastically discuss ideas together. Year 12 students chose biology based on the good reputation of sixth-form biology in the school, the teachers running the course and their own career aspirations. At this early stage of the course they are pleased. Year 13 students are very happy with their course and feel there is a good balance between theoretical and practical study.
161. Resources are satisfactory; however lack of laboratory based computer hardware constrains the use of data-logging apparatus already in the department. Accommodation is mainly good and very good in the newly refurbished laboratories.
162. Departmental management is currently satisfactory and potentially good. Standards have risen almost consistently over the last few years – the fall in 2003 was due to weaker students whose predicted grades were low. There is a limited overview of whole departmental performance which is partially due to lack of prior data on student achievement, and there has been little formal monitoring of teaching.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) at AS/A2 is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching results in students achieving well.
- Good relationships exist between students and teachers.
- Good resources support learning.
- More able students currently could be given more challenging work.
- The development of students' ICT skills through other subjects needs better support and monitoring in the sixth form.

Commentary

163. At the time of the previous inspection, the school did not offer ICT in the sixth form. It now offers an AS/A2 level modular course within the structure of the local sixth-form partnership. Students enter the course with a diversity of prior experience in ICT, ranging from high level GCSE/GNVQ grades to no previous accreditation. Vocational accreditation courses such as GNVQ and AVCE are also available within the partnership, but no students enrolled at the school currently pursue these courses.
164. Of the first cohort of students examined at AS level in 2002, the overall result was slightly below the national average. In 2003, all students achieved a pass grade in the A2 examination although the proportion of higher grades was low. Ninety-two per cent of students achieved a pass grade at AS level, with the full range of grades. When related to their prior experience, the grades awarded reflect good achievement for individual students.
165. From their broad base of prior experience, students currently following the A2 course are making satisfactory progress. All demonstrate competence and confidence in the use of basic office applications, and can discuss the application of management information solutions in a variety of contexts. They are able to relate their learning to real contexts, and they work well collaboratively. Achievement in Year 13, observed during lessons and through scrutiny of student work samples, is satisfactory for the stage of the course, but the work of a small number of students suggests that they would benefit from greater challenge from teachers. In Year 12, students just starting the course show interest and enthusiasm in learning about the structure and design of databases.
166. The teaching observed in a small sample of three lessons was good because teachers have good knowledge of the subject and provide supportive guidance for individuals. Difficult concepts are clearly explained and a judicious mix of activity and questioning is used to secure and confirm students' understanding. Ongoing work is regularly marked and annotated with helpful comments, but specific targets for improvement are not used in this context. Students have confidence in their teachers and report high levels of satisfaction and enthusiasm for the subject. There is a need for more planned extension activity for the more able and experienced students, both in class and in independent study, to ensure that they reach their full potential.
167. Leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are satisfactory but are fragmented and the future development of ICT within the sixth form is unclear. Whilst schemes of work exist to secure the good teaching of the AS/A2 course, currently there is no co-ordinated or accredited provision for ICT skills development of the wider body of students, a significant minority of whom have received no formal ICT teaching since the end of Year 9. A recently introduced initiative to provide Year 12 students with ICT-based study skills, through the social education curriculum, will help to bridge this gap, but a more coherent approach to securing appropriate skills for all students is needed. Technician support is excellent, resources good, and students appreciate the ready access to Internet resources via a broadband network.

168. At the time of the previous inspection, no accredited ICT courses were offered due to lack of infrastructure and resources. Substantial investment by governors and the school management team in hardware, software, and communications infrastructure has brought about a significant improvement in provision, and the AS/A2 courses are being implemented well. The impact on standards and provision has yet to be fully realised.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

169. All students have access to the school's network at all times, within ICT suites, in the learning resource centre and in subject areas, but the lack of co-ordinated or accredited provision for ICT skills development of sixth form students not following the AS/A2 course is a significant gap in meeting the needs of all students. Standards of competence in everyday use of ICT vary considerably and skills progression is not monitored. Students throughout the sixth form display responsible attitudes towards the use of the Internet as a resource and many are skilled in using this effectively and efficiently to support their research and studies. Many others have inadequate understanding of the structure of information online and how to mount an effective search for it. An initiative by the learning resource centre to address this particular issue has just been introduced for Year 12 students, but a more coherent approach to planning, monitoring and offering students appropriate skills accreditation is needed. The school's website is, as yet, insufficiently developed to offer a subject resource for sixth-form students; this would provide a good opportunity to involve interested and more able students of ICT to contribute to its design and maintenance.

HUMANITIES

History was the focus subject for the inspection, but geography and sociology were also sampled. In geography, one Year 12 (AS) and one Year 13 (A2) lesson were seen. Teaching in both was very good, adopting many of the strategies used very effectively with students in Years 10 and 11 while responding well to the needs of these more advanced learners. The emphasis on collaborative learning helps ensure that students from different institutions work effectively together. Standards of work are generally high, particularly in Year 12. In sociology, one Year 12 (AS) and one Year 13 (A2) lesson were seen. Teaching benefits from very good subject knowledge and good resources, but the range of activities is too narrow and not sufficiently engaging, leaving students too passive. Complex concepts and terminology are not always well enough explained, particularly to students new to the subject. Weaker students also need more support with their study.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standard of student discussion and debate is very high.
- Students are encouraged to consult an impressively wide range of historical sources.
- Teaching is never less than good and normally very good.
- There are no significant weaknesses in the department at sixth-form level.

Commentary

170. Standards are high. In 2002 none of the seven candidates in A-level history achieved less than a C grade. Although the provisional statistics for 2003 would appear less impressive, observation of lessons and scrutiny of work, including essays, involving the present sixth form suggests that the improved standards of recent years are being maintained. Students are achieving very well. Work being done by AS students was of a higher standard than would be expected at such an early stage in the course, whilst the present Year 13

demonstrated an impressive range of historical skills, an eagerness to participate in debate and an ability to make perceptive comparisons between the views of a good range of contemporary historians. Written work is of a generally high standard. Students are given regular assignments of an appropriate standard, are expected to consult a good range of sources and are given helpful and detailed advice on essay writing for A-level.

171. Teaching and learning are very effective. This is because teachers bring to the lessons excellent subject knowledge, which has clearly been kept up to date, and the skills to encourage and direct debate in a manner which challenges the most able whilst encouraging weaker students. As in the lower school, the lessons are mostly very well planned with a clear structure and explicit learning objectives. A feature of the good teaching is the encouragement of students to learn collaboratively through, for instance, group presentations to the class on alternative views on historical controversies. A very good example of this was in a Year 13 class where groups of students offered alternative views on why Gladstone became a Liberal: a similar discussion in Year 12 on the 1906 Liberal landslide led to interesting comparisons with recent New Labour election victories. An interesting discussion on the reforms of Alexander II in another Year 13 class led to a very lively debate about the attitude of the church in nineteenth century Russia to reform; however, this lesson would have been improved by greater challenge to one or two participants.
172. Students are appreciative of the teaching that makes history come alive. Dropout rates between Years 12 and 13 have been very low.
173. The leadership and management of history post-16 are very good, characterised as in the main school by very good planning and organisation. The head of department encourages high expectations and a spirit of enquiry in the department. Clearly, the departmental website, which he developed, is being fully used by sixth-formers who expressed appreciation of its value.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Product design

Provision in product design is **very good**.

Currently there are five students at A2 level and 13 students at AS level. Retention rates at AS level are usually good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination performance was well above the national average in 2001 and 2002.
- Teaching is very good.
- Presentational skills are of a high standard.
- The wider use of ICT drawing packages could further improve students' work.

Commentary

174. The 2001 A2 results were well above the national average for students achieving A-B grades and similar results were achieved in 2002 where students gained 87 per cent A-B grades. AS results over recent years have also been above or well above the national average. In 2003, the A2 results were not as good at A-B grades but all students gained success at A-E grades. This represented good achievement as all students exceeded the predictions that were based on prior attainment.

175. Standards of work in lessons and work seen are well above average in Years 12 and 13. Predicted grades and current standards of coursework support this judgement.
176. In Year 13, a good range of work is being investigated in design folders. The work is of a high standard with very good freehand sketching, development of initial ideas, use of colour, and appropriate use of ICT. Modelling of ideas shows awareness of strengths and weaknesses in design. Work in the computer mouse project in particular had excellent presentational skills and meaningful evaluation against original specification. The mobile phone project showed very good awareness of environmental issues including social and moral and the impact of materials used in manufacture of a product. These and other projects demonstrate that students combine very good presentational with imaginative and creative thinking necessary at this level. Some work is less well developed, drawings not annotated and evaluations not complete. The use of ICT is not as evident in some folders as others.
177. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are well planned to include whole class, group work and individual tasks. Very good subject expertise is used to extend and develop students' knowledge and skills. In a Year 12 lesson students were well focused on research techniques, including using the Internet, in their investigation of asthma canisters. The teacher promoted discussion around the topic, including environmental and production issues, which increased student learning and understanding. The group work which followed developed students' skills in communication. In Year 13, a smaller group of students were learning how to produce a time plan to meet coursework deadlines. Very mature relationships meant that students were very confident to ask questions around the topic and use teacher knowledge to develop their own learning. The teaching sets high expectations and students respond positively to the challenge. The teacher knows the students well and sets appropriate targets for individuals.
178. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a strong focus on high standards, and examination results have been very good up to 2003 with predictions showing a return to previous high performance. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. External visits and visiting speakers are used to support the learning, and the excellent display of students' work is used to promote and stimulate challenge for current students. There is now an inclusive entry policy which allows students with lower GCSE grades to follow the course.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design was the focus subject, but two sixth-form music lessons were sampled. The Year 12 students are competent sight-readers and they performed a Pavane and Galliard which they then analysed. Because the teacher has a very good understanding of the music of John Cage, Year 13 students improved their knowledge of 20th century music. All students gained high grades at GCSE: the Year 13 students also gained grades A and B in the AS level examination. There has been good retention of students. They enjoy the course and would recommend it to others. The majority are considering a career in music or arts-related employment. Drama was also sampled. The standards reached in drama at advanced level were average in 2002 and likely to be above average at AS level in 2003. There were small numbers in both these years, but there has been a large increase in the number of students taking drama this year. The standards of improvisation seen were good; students were convincing in their movement and mime.

Art and design

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

Strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good use of traditional media and materials to create interesting images.

- Teachers are very well informed and possess very good subject knowledge; their lesson planning is very good.
 - Very good use is made of questioning to draw responses from students.
 - The current curriculum places undue emphasis on art and craft activities.
 - There is limited access to modern technology such as ICT and photography in the art studios.
179. In the 2001 A-level examination the number of students achieving the highest grades of A to B was well above the national average. Girls' attainment was much higher than boys' that year. In 2002 there was significant improvement in boys' attainment but it remained below that of girls'. However, 80 per cent of students achieved grades A to B which was much higher once again than the national average, and an improvement over the previous year. Retention rates from GCSE into the sixth form are good, and this year approximately 30 percent of students have stayed on to pursue their interest in art and design in Year 12.
180. The standard of work that Year 13 students are producing is well above national expectations, and students achieve very well. By this stage students have greatly improved their capacity for thinking and acting independently and for resolving problems. They have developed a much deeper understanding of the design process and are capable of carrying out research away from the influence of their teachers in school. Their visual diaries show that most have become very skilled at collecting visual information from a wide range of different sources. The majority have acquired the capacity for carrying out thorough and detailed analysis of the work of other artists, for critical thinking and for communicating their own ideas, concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs to others.
181. Although Year 12 students have only just started on their AS level course, already they are working with great concentration to deepen their knowledge and understanding of art and design processes. A very significant minority is beginning to display confidence in the manner in which they record ideas through the use of different media and materials. They make very good use of their visual diaries to carry out critical analysis of paintings and artefacts.
182. Teaching is very good. Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and are very well informed about the requirements of the examination specifications. Organisation and planning are very good and questioning is used very effectively to open up discussion and debate about the nature of art and design and its importance to society. Students are required to show their depth of knowledge and understanding of the manner in which artists and designers throughout the ages have made use of many forms of visual imagery to communicate their ideas, concepts, values, attitudes and beliefs to a wider audience. Teachers have very high expectations of students and relationships are excellent. Due to very good teaching, which has some excellent qualities, learning is also very good.
183. Leadership and management are very good and good systems are in place to monitor students' progress. These can be improved however, and more effective use made of objective data to give feedback to individual students. The current curriculum is rather narrow and undue emphasis is placed on traditional activities such as drawing, painting and craft work to the detriment of design work incorporating modern technology, photography, computers, scanners, digital cameras and printers, within a work-related context.
184. Accommodation is good. There are three large art studios, one of which is used almost exclusively by Year 13 as a base room. Resources are good, but students have very limited access to photography or ICT equipment in the art studios themselves.
185. Improvement since the last inspection is very good and GCE A-level results in 2002 showed significant improvement over those for 2001. The range and depth of work seen during the inspection reinforces the judgement that the standard of students' work continues to improve.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are consistently good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students are committed and hardworking.
- There is no permanent base for theory work.

Commentary

186. In 2002, four of the seven students who sat A-level obtained A-B grades and all seven students achieved pass grades. At AS level, all 13 students entered obtained pass grades, but only two achieved A-B grades. In 2003 all nine students gained A-level passes with three achieving the higher grades. A total of 17 students followed the AS course in 2003. All but one achieved pass grades. Pass rates have therefore mostly been above average, with higher grade performance sometimes above and sometimes below average. Small numbers, however, make comparisons difficult.
187. Based on the analysis undertaken, these results represent good achievement. Standards reached by students in the current Year 13 are average, with all on course to gain pass grades. The quality of several personal exercise programmes is good. The programmes demonstrate that students have a thorough understanding of various aspects of health related fitness. They are comfortable using the correct terminology and most take a pride in the presentation of their work. Individual students achieve good standards in their practical options, particularly in football, netball and badminton.
188. Students have a responsible and committed attitude to their studies. This is also the case in Year 12 where 16 students have just begun the AS course. Most have a background of good grades at GCSE level and consequently they have the potential to do well, and their standards are above average. Students in both Years 12 and 13 are enthusiastic about physical education. In the practical lesson observed in Year 12, students applied themselves conscientiously to the tasks set and they worked well together. In Year 13 students are developing a sound understanding of biomechanics and they are able to apply what they are learning to practical situations.
189. The teaching of AS and A-level is very good and has a significant impact on students' progress. Expectations are high. Lessons are structured effectively resulting in good learning. Teachers ensure that students clearly understand the aims of each lesson so that they know what they are to learn. The consistency of approach that is apparent in the teaching and organisation has clearly contributed to the good results that have been achieved so far.
190. The examination courses have been successfully introduced since the last inspection and this represents a significant improvement. Attendance and retention are good.
191. The partnership arrangement, currently involving one partner school, is managed well. The partnership works very effectively to the mutual advantage of students from both schools. As a significant proportion of the course involves theoretical work, the teachers would benefit from the provision of a permanent base where visual displays, books, videos and other items of ICT equipment could be housed and could be readily accessible to both staff and students.
192. All sixth-form students have the opportunity to take part in recreational physical education for two periods each week. During the inspection more than 60 students took part in football,

basketball, badminton and trampolining on site, whilst several others trained at the local leisure centre. As only two members of staff are timetabled for each session, students take responsibility for organising some of their own activities and they do so sensibly and with maturity.

BUSINESS

No subjects were inspected in detail in this area, but in a very good Year 12 lesson students had quickly developed a good understanding of business constraints, and used computers well to gain and present information.

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	4
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	4
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	4	4
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for students	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		4
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		4
The governance of the school	3	4
The leadership of the headteacher		3
The leadership of other key staff	2	4
The effectiveness of management	3	4

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

