

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Kings Norton, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103533

Headteacher: Mr J. Foley

Lead inspector: Mr D. Driscoll

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 25th March 2004

Inspection number: 259249

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

© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

Terms used in this report

*Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools **after** Year 6. Students in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for students and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the students know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (**A-level**). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (**AS**), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (**AEA**).*

Inspectors judge the standards reached by students by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for students of the same age nationally. The students' achievements reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational value added over time. In this report, similar schools are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1293
School address:	St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School Wychall Lane Kings Norton Birmingham
Postcode:	B38 8AP
Telephone number:	0121 464 4643
Fax number:	0121 464 4043
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr L. Docherty
Date of previous inspection:	2 nd February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Thomas Aquinas is a Catholic comprehensive school that is larger than average, with a larger than average sixth form. The school is very popular with parents; there are many more parents wishing to send their children to the school than there are places available. The great majority of students are white British or Irish, with small numbers from each of a very large number of different ethnic backgrounds, including a small number of refugees and asylum seekers. The proportion of students whose mother tongue is not English is a bit higher than other schools and three students are at an early stage of learning English. There are more boys than girls in every year in the main school.

Standards of attainment on entry to the school are average overall. Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average, reflecting the school's policy of accepting students of all levels of attainment. The proportion of students with special educational needs is average, while the proportion with a statement is below average. Most students are on the register because they have moderate or specific learning difficulties or social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. There are now many more students with special educational needs at the school than there were at the time of the previous inspection, and a much higher proportion with statements.

Students come from a very wide area, taking in much of South Birmingham; socio-economic circumstances are below average. The great majority of students are baptised Catholics. The school is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative and became a specialist mathematics and computing college in September 2003. The school received awards for achievement and work on basic skills in 2003. One quarter of the teaching staff was new to the school in September; this was exceptional and was due entirely to promotion or retirement.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
11933	D. Driscoll	Lead inspector	
9086	R. Watkins	Lay inspector	
33139	M. Wilson	Team inspector	Mathematics
19596	B. Treacy	Team inspector	English
4145	C. Harrison	Team inspector	Science
10297	D. Cox	Team inspector	Design and technology
17868	E. Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art and design; English in the sixth form.
15208	A. Briggs	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
31705	J. Mason	Team inspector	Music
15462	C. Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography Leisure and tourism in the sixth form
3793	J. Peach	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
22411	A. Axon	Team inspector	Mathematics in the sixth form
12985	S. Jeffray	Team inspector	Physical education
30427	F. Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History
2597	C. Jackson	Team inspector	Business studies
11720	P. Winch	Team inspector	Special educational needs; Media studies in the sixth form.
17278	B. Abrams	Team inspector	Chemistry in the sixth form
22590	R. Castle	Team inspector	Citizenship

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)

3 Harrowby Road
West Park
Leeds
LS16 5HN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted*'

Inspections', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	11
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	18
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	26
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	28
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	64

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school that provides a **good** quality of education and very good value for money. The school is led and managed well.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students' spiritual and moral development is outstanding because the school puts its Catholic ethos into practice in all that it does.
- Standards are above average by the end of Year 11, reflecting students' good achievement as a result of good teaching.
- Students are underachieving in food technology as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.
- Standards are improving rapidly under the very good leadership provided by the headteacher.
- Punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory.
- Pastoral care and links with other schools and the community are very good.
- Students who are gifted or talented do very well as a result of excellent provision.
- Marking does not pay enough attention to telling students how to improve.

Progress since the last inspection has been **very good**. Standards are higher and results have improved faster than the national trend. All of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been addressed successfully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is **good**. Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Students achieve well in most of their subjects, but underachieve in food technology and information and communication technology (ICT); the underachievement in ICT has been dealt with. Students learning English for the first time do well in all years and those who are gifted or talented achieve very well. Achievement in the sixth form is good; standards are average, which represents good achievement from their below average standards on entry to the sixth form.

Students' personal qualities, including their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are **very good**. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Attendance is below average, and punctuality is unsatisfactory. Students in the sixth form have good attitudes; their behaviour is very good. Their attendance at school is satisfactory, but their punctuality and attendance at lessons are unsatisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a **good** quality of education. Teaching is **good**. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form; they are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is good in most subjects, but is unsatisfactory in food technology. Teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements and how to get the best results from their students. Teaching and learning are also good in the sixth form. Teaching is very good in English literature and physical education, but only satisfactory in mathematics.

The curriculum is good; it is good in Years 7 to 9, satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. There is a very good range of extra clubs and activities. Provision for special educational needs and for vulnerable students is good. The quality of guidance and support for students is very good. The school has a very good partnership with parents, local schools and the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the school by the headteacher is very good and by other staff is **good**, as is the school's management. Governance is good. There is a strong emphasis on equality.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Comments are based on those students and parents who responded to the questionnaires or attended the parents' meeting.

Parents are very happy with the education their children receive and have no major concerns.

Students too are very happy; they feel that the teacher mentor is both 'amazing' and 'cool', but would like the school's décor to be improved.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in food technology
- Ensure that students get to lessons on time
- Encourage all teachers to mark books in a way that helps students to improve their work

and, in the sixth form:

- Improve attendance to lessons

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form provides a **good** education and its cost-effectiveness is **good**. There has been good improvement since the last inspection as a result of good leadership and management.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- The school goes to great lengths to ensure that all students are placed on the most appropriate courses
- Punctuality and attendance to lessons are unsatisfactory.
- Students achieve very well in English literature and physical education because the teaching is very good.

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	Provision in English literature is very good . Teaching of critical analysis is particularly good so students achieve very well. Provision in French is good . Students are achieving well because they are given plenty of support and regularly work with authentic materials.
Mathematics	Satisfactory . Teachers do not always match the work to the needs of the highest attainers.
Science	Provision in chemistry is good . Lessons are well planned and use a variety of methods that motivate students.
Information and communication technology	Good . Students learn and achieve well because of good teaching.
Humanities	Provision in history is good . Teachers provide good informal advice to students on their individual progress.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology is good . Students achieve well as a consequence of good teaching.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in media studies is good . Teaching is consistently good and students learn rapidly.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is very good . Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Provision in leisure and recreation is good . Students achieve well because of good teaching.
Business	Provision in business studies is good . Skilful teaching meets the needs of individual students well.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Very good attention is given to students' welfare and guidance. Good attention is given to health and safety. Students have good opportunities to express their views about the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are **good**. The sixth form has made good progress in recent years and benefits from the same good leadership and management systems that exist in the main school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students in the sixth form are very happy at the school and have no real complaints about their own education. They are particularly appreciative of the time and effort provided by their teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Main school

Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11. Students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Parents are pleased with the progress their children make at the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in their GCSE examinations given their standards on joining the school.
- Results in the National Tests at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are improving faster than the national average.
- Students underachieve in food technology in Years 7 to 9.
- Students who are gifted or talented achieve very well.

Commentary

1. By the end of Year 9, standards are average, which represents satisfactory achievement given students' standards on joining the school. Results from the national tests in 2003 were above average in mathematics and science and average in English. Students did not do as well as they should have in these tests, given their standards on joining the school, but standards in all three subjects have improved so that underachievement is no longer an issue. Standards are now average in English and above average in mathematics and science; achievement is satisfactory in English and good in mathematics and science. Standards are average in most other subjects, but are above average in art and design and geography and below average in design and technology and ICT.
2. In Years 7 to 9, students achieve well in most of their subjects, and achievement is satisfactory in English, design and technology, French and ICT. Students in Years 7 and 8 are doing better in ICT than those in Year 9. In fact, students in Year 9 are underachieving in ICT, because the provision has not been good enough in the past so they have not learnt all that they should have by now. The school has bought many new computers and employed new teachers so that students now get more lessons, which are well taught, and the causes of underachievement have been dealt with successfully; students are now making good progress in lessons. There is, however, still some underachievement in design and technology as a result of unsatisfactory teaching in food technology.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.0 (33.5)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.4 (36.0)	35.4 (34.7)

Science	35.1 (35.1)	33.6 (33.3)
---------	-------------	-------------

There were 227 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11; standards are above average. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were above average overall. These results were much better than would usually be expected from the students' results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and above those expected from their standards on joining the school. Results have been improving at a faster rate than that seen nationally. Standards are now above average in most subjects, including the examination course in physical education, but well above average in mathematics, German and science, and average in citizenship, design and technology and the core programme in physical education. Standards are below average in ICT.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	64 (58)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	40.4 (34.7)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 203 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Students achieve well in all their subjects, except for ICT where students are underachieving. The students in ICT have suffered from the same situation as Year 9 students, only for longer. However, as in Years 7 to 9, the school has sorted the problems out and students are now making satisfactory progress in their lessons.
- In all years, the level of achievement can be attributed to the quality of teaching that the students receive. However, in French in Years 10 and 11 and citizenship throughout the school, students achieve well despite teaching being only satisfactory. In French, students work very hard outside of lessons, especially in preparation for the examinations. In citizenship, the school's Catholic ethos provides a real boost, in that students are taught to be good citizens through the daily life of the school and the way that staff treat them. This consistent reminder of the principles that underpin a civilised society raises students' achievement to a good level.
- In all years, there are few differences between the achievements of different groups of students. Girls gained better results than boys in their GCSE examinations in 2003, but the boys' results were well above the national average for boys, while the girls' results were above the average for girls. However, a similar difference existed when the students were in Year 9, so the difference is not down to boys making progress more quickly than girls. There are a few minor differences in achievement, such as in French where boys do better than girls because they like the coursework, but much greater are some of the differences between the achievement of other groups of students.
- Students who are at the early stages of learning English are withdrawn from lessons and receive very good support either individually or in small groups. Overall, these students achieve well in

all years. A significant strength of the provision is that the support is given over an extended period of time and the specialist teacher gets to know students well. However, students do not receive specialist support in lessons; consequently much depends upon the individual teacher as to how much help they receive, and this is variable. Where teachers have experience of dealing with such students or where they are paired with other students, who are bilingual, the students can make great leaps in their understanding. In other lessons, where teachers do not have enough guidance or support, the students can struggle to understand some of the content.

8. Students who are particularly gifted or talented achieve very well in all years. The opportunities open to them are extensive and improving all the time. Many raise their standards well beyond that which would usually be expected, as a result of outstanding provision in some areas, such as dance and the opportunity to take extra GCSE examinations.
9. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good. It is very good in reading because of the varied provision the school makes to help students read better. Those with behavioural difficulties achieve well in managing their behaviour as a result of the good support in the Aquinas Support Centre. In the main school, students with special educational needs achieve similarly to other students. Where the extra learning support in class takes account of the targets in the individual education plans, students' achievement is at least good. At the end of Year 11, they take the full range of GCSE examinations and do well in relation to their capabilities.
10. Standards in the basic skills of mathematics, language and literacy are above average. Standards of basic competence in ICT are not as good and are average, because the school has not placed the same emphasis on developing ICT skills as it has placed on developing other basic skills.
11. Standards and achievement have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Sixth form

Standards are average and students are achieving well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well on many courses and very well in English literature and physical education.
- Achievement is only satisfactory in mathematics.

Commentary

12. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were average, but lower than they have been in recent years. Nevertheless, students achieved well and results fluctuate as a reflection of the standards on entry to the sixth form rather than any decline in provision. Results for males and females were similar and there are no differences between the achievements of different groups of students. Results are now considerably better than they were at the time of the previous inspection.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	86.1 (91.3)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	26.8 (25.4)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	242.8 (262.5)	253.1 (254.5)

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

13. The school has an open entry policy to the sixth form, so there are almost no minimum entry requirements for the different courses. As a result, standards on entry to the sixth form vary from year to year and from course to course. In design and technology, for example, standards are below average but this still represents good achievement for the students whose standards on joining the course were well below average. Some individuals have gaps in their work as a result of unsatisfactory attendance at lessons.
14. Achievement is good in nearly all subjects but is very good in English literature and physical education. Achievement in mathematics, on the other hand, is only satisfactory. In English literature, students are taught to think critically, which helps them to develop very good analytical skills. In physical education, the work is very demanding, both in terms of the content and the sheer pace of lessons. Mathematics is one of the very few subjects that have a minimum entry requirement and, as a result, standards on entry to the course are much higher than in most other subjects. There are several students studying mathematics who gained the top grades at GCSE and these students are not being pushed in the same way that other students, often lower attainers, are in other subjects.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Main school

Students' attitudes are good. Their spiritual and moral development is excellent because of the excellent provision for these areas, rooted in the Catholic beliefs and aims of the school. Their behaviour is also good, helped by the good promotion of their social development. Cultural development is good. Attendance is below average and punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students gain a very strong understanding and respect for religious beliefs because these pervade their life in school so extensively.
- Students are interested and hard-working in lessons and mostly behave well, though the use of exclusion is rather high.
- Relationships are very good.
- Teachers do not challenge late arrival to lessons sufficiently.
- Attendance is below average, though it is currently improving because of very good efforts now made by the school.

Commentary

15. Students value their school and this is reflected in their willing participation across the whole spread of school activities. In lessons they concentrate well, especially when skilled teaching

holds their interest, and this helps their progress. On occasion students show considerable motivation to succeed. In modern foreign languages for instance, the amount of work GCSE students do at home has a really noticeable impact on their achievement. Many students still work hard even if teaching is less inspiring. A small minority, though, depend on the teacher to keep them focused. If suitable strategies are lacking, they may lapse into unnecessary chat and distracting behaviour, as happens in occasional Year 8 lessons.

16. The school firmly upholds standards of behaviour and uses short fixed-term exclusion to respond to poor behaviour. The number of such exclusions has increased since the previous inspection. Various good strategies to reduce incidents resulting in exclusion, including support for teachers who need advice about managing behaviour and also anger management courses for students in the new Aquinas Support Centre, are in place. However, their impact on exclusion levels is yet to be seen. Permanent exclusion is rare because of the caring perseverance to support individuals with behavioural difficulties. Although the small numbers involved make firm conclusions difficult, indications are that following specialist mentoring, proportions of African-Caribbean students excluded are lower than often happens elsewhere. However, exclusions of mixed race students remain relatively high.
17. Students are usually very friendly and supportive towards each other, even if occasionally over-boisterous around the school. Parents and students have few concerns about bullying or other harassment. A good range of channels is available for seeking help on any issues and the school responds effectively to any incident reported. A few students feel they might prefer to cope alone or with friends if such problems arose. Staff make continuing efforts to raise students' awareness of effective responses to any concerns.
18. The strong Catholic ethos of the school provides a very secure foundation for students' personal development. It enables students to become spiritually sensitive and reflective. They have very good opportunities to consider ultimate questions about life and to develop their own responses to them. They recognise and respect the tenets of the Catholic Church, whilst having the freedom to consider and discuss their own beliefs openly. The spiritual quality of the mass that took place during the inspection was tangible. The response of the students was uplifting and sensitive; they made an impressive contribution to a really memorable occasion. The open chapel provides an excellent space for reflection and prayer, and the retreats attended by students during their time at the school provide valuable space for spiritual growth.

Example of outstanding practice

Using a mass to promote spiritual and moral development.

The occasion was the annual mass for Year 10 and the theme was having a change of heart. The organisation was perfect and the whole event was expertly managed. The students' role in the mass was outstanding. Many read aloud, led prayers, sang or played music; others had produced the decorations and displays in the hall. One black student spoke incredibly movingly about the suffering of people simply because of their colour, while another student spoke of the suffering of the Jews for their religion against a backdrop of images from around the world. The response of the other students was equally outstanding; they listened with rapt attention and joined in the singing joyfully. The experience was truly uplifting. However, the key to the success of the mass had nothing to do with it being a religious observance. It was the type of assembly that could take place in any school, anywhere, providing that the school had already put into practice an ethos where students could feel comfortable in expressing their values.

19. In many subjects students are encouraged to take a moral viewpoint of the topics they study, and the GCSE history visit to the battlefields and war graves in Belgium adds great poignancy to the information they receive. Their response to the needs of others is a reflection of the school's belief in the brotherhood of man. Students are encouraged to set themselves targets for

their community involvement through the Aquinas certificate that recognises and celebrates this service. Their wide support for community service and fundraising for the needy demonstrate that the students share a strong sense of responsibility.

20. Students' very good response to the needs of others outside the school community is matched by a similar response to the needs of their fellows within the school. Students work well together on group productions and presentations, many of which support the spiritual life of the school. They do not generally seek to lead, however, or to be innovative, but are very happy to follow the lead presented by the school. Through lessons and other activities, students learn of peoples and cultures in different parts of the world. The Irish week in 2002 proved to be a valuable opportunity for many to celebrate their Irish roots and culture. There are, however, few opportunities to celebrate other aspects of the ethnic diversity of Britain today, or to celebrate other cultures represented within the school.

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	945	67	1
White – Irish	151	20	
White – any other White background	24		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	25	19	
Mixed – White and Black African	7		
Mixed – White and Asian	6	3	
Mixed – any other mixed background	29	5	
Asian or Asian British – Indian	15		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	12		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	17		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	19	1	
Black or Black British – African	2	1	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	12		
Chinese	2		
Any other ethnic group	4		
No ethnic group recorded	23	1	

The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded. The number of students on roll is for the current year

21. Attendance in 2002-2003 fell below that usually seen in other schools. Staff quickly noticed and responded effectively. For instance, a specialist agency was employed to 'phone the parents of targeted poor attenders if they failed to arrive. Attendance so far this year shows a clear improvement, although it still falls below 90 per cent in a few tutor groups, especially those involving older students. Unauthorised absence is high because the school takes a strict line

about authorising absence. For instance, it refuses to authorise absences for family holidays. The school also encourages punctual arrival and prompt movement between lessons, but too many students arrive during the registration period or interrupt lessons by arriving late and this is often not challenged sufficiently by the teachers concerned.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (2002-2003) (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.5	School data	2.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

Students’ attitudes are good and their behaviour is very good. Their spiritual and moral development is excellent and their social and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are keen to succeed and they value the good provision made for them.
- Relationships are very good.
- Students develop as very mature, thoughtful individuals and make important contributions to the life of the school.
- Although overall statistics show attendance in the sixth form is satisfactory, students’ attendance at individual lessons is too variable.

Commentary

22. Students are proud of their school and value the good learning environment it provides, especially the way teachers support them. Very good relationships result, both with teachers and between students. Consequently, students from across the range of abilities mostly apply themselves very well in lessons, in a serious and mature way. With few exceptions, they respond very well when asked to contribute orally. They readily show a good capacity to act independently and also to organise themselves to work together effectively on occasions when opportunities are offered, for instance in media studies. However, they still concentrate well when the teaching style is more didactic, even if this is to the extent that the lesson risks being boring, as happens at times in business education.
23. Students’ personal development is very good. They have the freedom to discuss their beliefs and ideals openly and many take a leading role in the spiritual life of the school. Their involvement with the charitable activities of the St Vincent de Paul Society challenges them to play a very active role in their community and to recognise the influence of belief on the actions of the individual. They are good role models for younger students through their support for the reading scheme and through their mentoring. They are very willing and keen to support teachers in organising the range of school activities. Their roles are largely supportive, however, and there are limited opportunities for them to be pro-active or to take independent

leadership roles. Where the opportunities exist for the few, such as through the Birmingham Catholic Partnership's young leaders scheme, they flourish.

24. In one respect students' attention to learning needs to improve. Attendance at individual lessons is too variable. Class registers show that in some subjects it is rare for the whole class to be present; one student or another is always missing. Those absent may be on the premises but occupying themselves in other ways; one teacher gathered students in by contacting missing ones on their mobile phones five minutes after the start of the lesson. Although a good system is in place for reporting and following up absences from lessons, teachers do not use it consistently enough. Lateness to some lessons is also a concern.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Main school

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The quality of assessment of students' work is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a very good understanding of the examination requirements, so students do well in examinations.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory in food technology, so students underachieve.
- Very good use is made of assessment data, but marking is only satisfactory.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 212 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (2%)	37 (17%)	112 (53%)	48 (23%)	8 (4%)	3 (1%)	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.

Commentary

25. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is satisfactory in English, citizenship, design and technology and French; teaching is good in all other subjects. However, teaching is unsatisfactory in food technology because students' behaviour is not controlled. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good in all subjects except citizenship, French and ICT, where it is satisfactory.
26. The main difference in the quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 and that lower down the school stems from the teachers' very good knowledge of the examination criteria. Lessons are planned so as to ensure that students know what they need to do to maximise their marks both on coursework and in the final examination.

27. Many teachers now plan lessons using a 'three-part strategy', where there is a starter activity aimed at getting students interested, a main part of the lesson and a final round-up of what has been learnt. This usually works very well, but the starter activity is often ruined by students arriving late to lessons and disrupting the lesson for others. Teachers do not challenge such late arrival sufficiently, often because they are already in the middle of an activity.
28. One area where teachers really bring about significant improvement is in the role models they provide for students. For example, if a teacher makes an error, or is inadvertently rude to a student, the teacher apologises in front of the class. In return, if a student misbehaves, they too will apologise to the teacher and the rest of the class. There is no stigma attached to such actions, rather it is seen as the right thing to do, strongly reflecting the impact of the school's Catholic ethos of respect for one another. As a result, students' moral values are improved significantly.
29. The very high turnover of staff this year, which was exceptional, has inevitably led to some variation in quality between different teachers. Some new members of staff simply have not got into the way of working that is expected in St Thomas Aquinas. This variation is more noticeable in Years 7 to 9, where there are fewer tightly defined criteria to meet than there are at examination level.
30. One area where there is considerable variation is in the quality of marking. Marks and grades are often very accurate, so that the school has a very clear picture of how students are doing. The wide range of information that the school holds about students' achievements is used very well to track their progress and to set them targets for improvement. ICT is used well to allow teachers easy access to accurate and relevant information about the students that they teach so that they can plan their lessons appropriately. However, the marking of everyday work in a way that provides guidance to students is only satisfactory. For example, there are very good systems in place to improve students' literacy skills, but these are not being supported by a consistent approach to correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar in students' work. The result is that students get a very clear idea of how they are doing, but only satisfactory guidance on how to improve.
31. The teaching and learning of students with special educational needs are good. Teachers and support assistants know students well and provide a variety of interesting activities to help students learn in small steps. Relationships are very good so that students behave well and work hard. In the Aquinas Support Centre, students feel free to discuss their behaviour because teachers create an informal atmosphere in which students know their contributions will be valued. Classroom and learning support assistants generally offer good support. They have a thorough knowledge of how students learn best, encourage students to concentrate on their work and record achievement for each lesson. However, in a few lessons assistants give too much help, which takes away the students' independence, or too little, which is not effective in helping students to learn. Students who are at an early stage of learning English get very good support when they are withdrawn from lessons, but their progress slows when they do not get enough in-class support.

Sixth form

Teaching in the sixth form is good and brings about good learning. Procedures for, and use of, assessment are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good in English literature and physical education.
- Marking is very thorough so students know what to do to improve.
- Teachers do not make sure that students catch up with work they have missed.

Commentary

32. Many of the same strengths in the teaching found in Years 10 and 11 are also apparent in the sixth form. Teachers possess a very good knowledge of their subjects and of the examination requirements, so that lessons can be planned that will allow students to do well in their examinations. The marking in the sixth form is considerably better than the main school; not only are grades and marks accurate, but teachers provide much more in the way of written comments so that students know what they have to do to improve. Students' progress is tracked very well; there is a well-established system for reviewing students' performance, comparing this with predictions for future attainment, and this allows teachers to intervene promptly if action is needed. However, one area where teachers do not intervene enough is in making sure that students catch up the work they have missed through absence.
33. Teaching is particularly demanding in English literature and physical education. In English literature, the teachers have focused their work extremely well on the key thinking skills that are required for the subject, so students achieve exceptionally well in areas such as analysis. In physical education, the very good learning is a result of the pace of lessons, where huge amounts are covered in short periods because the work gains the students' total concentration. In mathematics, however, expectations are not as high as in other subjects. Here, achievement is only satisfactory because the very highest attainers are doing just enough, rather than really forging ahead.

The curriculum

Main school

The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. There is a very good range of extra clubs and activities. The school has a satisfactory match of teachers, resources and accommodation to its needs; the match of support staff is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has a very strong commitment to students being treated equally.
- There are many opportunities for students, in all years, to attend extra clubs and activities.
- Excellent provision is made for students who are gifted and talented.
- The school's specialist status is used very well to support other schools and the community.
- The design and technology curriculum is very narrow in Years 10 and 11 with far fewer students studying the subject than is usually seen.

Commentary

34. The school is intent on providing a broad curriculum in which all students receive their statutory entitlement and is entirely successful in its efforts. In keeping with the school's Catholic ethos, all students are valued and nurtured equally.
35. In Years 7 to 9, students are taught a range of subjects, including all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education and drama. A small group of students also study a second language outside of normal school hours. A strength of the school is the very good liaison it has with other schools; this enables a seamless progression for students from Year 6 into Year 7. Through its specialist school status, closer links with primary schools and the school's partner secondary school have been forged. For example, ICT technical support is provided to primary schools and teachers at St Thomas Aquinas are getting a much clearer picture of each student's achievements at their previous schools.
36. Students follow a good range of different subjects, including vocational ones, in Years 10 and 11 that are well suited to their needs. A small group of students is provided with an alternative curriculum in co-operation with a local college of further education. However, the curriculum in design and technology is very narrow, as there is no food or textiles technology.
37. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, music, dance, drama, computing and a flourishing Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. There is a very good range of trips each year, which include trips to Rome that help to raise students' awareness of global issues and a huge number of residential experiences. Students may study for extra GCSEs outside of school time and parents praise the school for the level of support provided by teachers outside of the school day.
38. The school makes excellent provision in the form of a wide range of activities for those students who are particularly gifted or talented. Much of the provision is embedded within subjects and because of the inclusive nature of the school; all students benefit from these programmes. For example, in history, a 'historian in residence' provides a different insight into historical events. The impact of such programmes is seen in the increased achievement of students.
39. The provision for students with special educational needs is good. Before school, younger students receive help with reading from trained Year 12 students or with English skills from a learning support assistant. The social use of language programme gives very good opportunities for students to improve speaking and listening and they learn quickly. In the Aquinas Support Centre, students improve social skills and behaviour management.
40. The school provides specific lessons in personal and social education; these are planned and taught well and are highly regarded by students. Careers guidance has improved recently and is now very good. The school has won awards for its work on careers education; a particular strength is the way that students are taught to research career opportunities for themselves.
41. The school has an outstanding team of technical staff in ICT, much larger than is usually seen. They not only ensure the very smooth running of the school's systems but also provide extremely valuable support and guidance for partner primary schools.

Sixth form

The curriculum is very good. There is a very good range of extra clubs and activities. The school has a satisfactory match of teachers, resources and accommodation to its needs; the match of support staff is good, for the same reasons as in the main school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school takes very good account of students' circumstances to match them to appropriate courses.
- Students have the same very good opportunities to enrich their curriculum as students lower down the school.

Commentary

42. The school provides a very good range of courses, at different levels, that are very suitable for the students staying on to the sixth form. A key feature of the curriculum is the way that students' previous experiences are evaluated and as a result, students are guided towards the most appropriate course that will enhance and enrich their studies. The school uses the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) scheme to improve students' ICT skills, which they then use to enhance their coursework. Students in the sixth form have the same very good opportunities to enrich their studies as other students in the school. Through the Catholic School Partnership, there are special events, such as those devoted to developing modern languages. Through such events, the school extends and enhances its own provision. The school has a good 'curriculum enrichment' programme that includes ICT, religious education and citizenship, although no provision is made for all students to participate in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Main school

Guidance and support for students are very good. Health and safety arrangements are good. Good account is taken of students' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students benefit in both their personal and academic development from well-organised and very caring academic and personal support.
- Very good attention is generally given to students' welfare but the dirty state of rented changing rooms used for off-site physical education activities is a concern.
- Students are actively encouraged to contribute to decisions about the functioning of the school community.

Commentary

43. The expectations, efforts and example of staff all combine to create a very welcoming and caring environment. Parents are happy with the quality of support and guidance. Students greatly value the willing support of their subject teachers; they are sure they can get extra help with any work they do not understand. Older students appreciate the sessions held after school and in the holidays in preparation for examinations. Teachers also make a good contribution to students' support through their roles as tutors. They use the morning tutor period well, to set a context for the day's work through prayer and to cover various helpful activities. They query lateness, give personal support to individuals if it is needed and encourage good use of time for reading or other work. They also support students' well-being through their delivery of the

personal and social education programme. In addition to this day-to-day support tutors meet with students on two review days each year to discuss achievements and future targets.

44. Teachers have a good understanding of the needs of those individuals who face barriers to achievement such as disadvantageous home circumstances or behavioural difficulties. Very good attention is given to child protection procedures and to meeting the specific needs of any students in public care. Some with behavioural difficulties are beginning to benefit from targeted support, such as anger management courses, now run by the new Aquinas Support Centre. Specialist mentoring helps meet particular needs of African Caribbean students, although the number of mixed race students involved in fixed-term exclusions suggests some of these still need further support.
45. Special educational needs staff make a very good contribution to the personal development of students with learning and behavioural difficulties. Their sensitivity to students' needs gives students a greater confidence in their ability to improve. The Aquinas Support Centre gives vulnerable students the chance to air problems without fear of being judged. Students say they manage their anger better as a result of the time they spend in the centre. Many students are very positive about the part played by the teacher mentor, who they feel they can turn to with any concern.
46. The school nurse helps meet students' needs for advice and support, as well as being readily available, together with several other trained staff, to give first aid. Careful attention is given to ensuring the safe conduct of school activities. Suitable risk assessment procedures are generally in place to underpin routines but the school recognises that its fire risk assessments could be recorded in greater detail. The dirty, unwholesome state of the changing rooms at the separately owned off-site facilities used regularly for outdoor physical education lessons gives rise to concern.
47. The school shows a good capacity to take account of students' opinions. For instance, students have been involved in the development of a garden, to enhance the otherwise rather sterile outside areas. A well-structured system for 'listening to views' enables the school to regularly put forward items for consideration by each year group and also to listen to ideas that students generate. A suggestion box offers an accessible alternative route. Students know from experience that staff will follow their suggestions wherever this is practicable. For instance, they appreciate the drinking fountains now installed for their use.

Sixth form

Very good routines are in place for students' educational and personal guidance. The same good routines for health and safety are followed as in the main school. Students have good opportunities to express their views about aspects of school life.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students like the friendly and very supportive atmosphere and their work benefits from the way staff are always ready to help.

- Guidance on further study and career opportunities is very good.

Commentary

48. Students are very happy with the support that subject teachers readily give to aid their success on their courses. They appreciate the extra freedom and responsibility they experience in the sixth form but at the same time are confident that if they need extra help they only have to ask. Indeed, they feel that staff are often pro-active in picking up and resolving difficulties that emerge in their work. In one respect, however, support for them is less strong; teachers are not consistent enough in promoting habits of regular attendance at every lesson.
49. Guidance about sixth form studies starts well before students join. They receive due information about the full range of post-16 options open to them. The courses available in the sixth form and the commitment required are explained at a meeting for Year 11 students and their parents during the autumn term. After this a taster day allows all students, including those considering a transfer from other schools, to experience lessons in their preferred subjects. Students like this day because it helps them refine their choices; the school finds that fewer drop out from courses since it was introduced. The good account taken of students' preferences for combinations of courses aids their motivation and contributes to their achievements. Guidance about choosing and following future routes also gets careful attention. Those applying to university appreciate the advice about compiling their personal statements, for instance.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Main school

Very good efforts are made to inform and involve parents, resulting in a very good sense of partnership. Links with the community and with other schools and educational establishments are also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The weekly newsletters are a very good source of information about the life of the school community and encourage parents' interest and involvement.
- Systems for telling parents about students' work and achievements ensure a very good flow of information.
- The school's new specialist college status is already being exploited very effectively, to enhance existing links with other schools and with the wider community.

Commentary

50. Very good attention is given to informing parents and encouraging their involvement. The weekly newsletter plays a key part. It is full of items about recent and forthcoming events. It celebrates achievements and reinforces expectations, for instance of punctuality. It unfailingly reflects the school's Catholic character, by including a prayer for the week as well as by celebrating activities that promote students' strong spiritual and moral development. Copies of recent newsletters are also available on the school's website together with other useful

information. A twice-yearly newspaper produced to a high standard further highlights the school's aims and successes.

51. Similarly good attention is given to informing parents about students' progress. In addition to receiving annual reports with a good level of detail, parents are invited to school regularly to meet with teachers. The school works hard to encourage their attendance and nearly all come to the annual discussions with subject teachers. Good numbers also come on target setting days; more than three in five students were accompanied by a parent at the most recent one. In addition parents appreciate the informative education evenings, for instance about Year 9 options choices. Staff respond to parents' comments; for instance an extra education evening for Year 10 was organised, when parents asked, to tell them more about students' GCSE courses. The school actively engages parents' involvement in other ways, for instance by its encouragement for the friends' association.
52. Pupils in feeder primary schools are already benefiting significantly from the specialist input for mathematics and ICT enabled by the school's new specialist status. Effective liaison is now building to enhance links in other subject areas. The wider community is also gaining; an introductory course in mentoring skills and another in ICT have already proved very successful. Well-established links, through the Birmingham Catholic Partnership, the local Excellence in Cities cluster and with a nearby city learning centre, already contribute in important ways to the expertise of teachers and to the breadth of students' experience. Partnership with local colleges also plays a part; it allows an alternative curriculum to be offered to meet the needs of a few older students. Well-established links with organisations including local parishes and diocesan residential youth centres make an important contribution to students' personal development.
53. The links between the school and parents of students with special educational needs are very good. Frequent contact is made by telephone and letter, and separate parents' evenings are arranged for them. Parents say they value the good provision the school makes to help their sons and daughters learn better. Links with primary schools, too, are very good because of the co-operation between the head of Year 7 and the special needs co-ordinator. This results in the co-ordinator visiting schools where there are Year 6 pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties who will transfer to the school in September. This smooths the transition to secondary education for these students.

Sixth form

Partnership with parents is very good. Links with the community and with other educational establishments are also very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good encouragement for parental involvement continues from the main school into the sixth form
- Links with the community, with other schools and with universities all contribute significantly to both students' academic achievements and their personal development

Commentary

54. Very good routines for informing and involving parents are in place, as in the main school. The high quality weekly newsletters celebrate sixth form successes alongside events involving younger students. Parents get plenty of information about the sixth form before their son or daughter joins. Their involvement is further helped by the Year 12 education evening that tells them right at the start of the year of the expectations of students for the coming months. Encouraged by the school, they come in very good numbers to parents' evenings for discussions with subject teachers. If problems arise at any time, parents are contacted, just as happens with younger students.
55. Sixth formers benefit from a variety of links between subject areas and university departments that add an important dimension to their studies. Links with other schools, especially those established through the Birmingham Catholic Partnership, also contribute. For instance, modern foreign languages students attend a conference at a local university along with others from companion Catholic schools. Other students, in business education for example, gain from relevant links in place with local firms and organisations. Students for their part contribute to the community; for instance some helped as tutors on the recent very popular beginners' ICT course for adults. Links with local parishes and with charities benefit the local and wider community as well as playing an important part in students' very good personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the school by the headteacher is very good and he is supported by the good leadership shown by other key members of staff. Governance and management are both good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's Catholic ethos stems from the headteacher's very good leadership.
- The leadership of the pastoral work of the school is very good.
- Data is used very well to identify strengths and weaknesses, but some actions are not taken quickly enough.

Commentary

56. The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected; results have improved at a faster rate than the national average and the school has been granted specialist status. The impetus for such improvement comes from the headteacher and his commitment to providing for all students equally. The Catholic nature of the school is fundamental to its work, but the fact that so many staff and governors share the values that it promotes is down to the headteacher and his emphasis on ensuring that its Catholic ethos shines through in all that it does. As a result, the school has a profound effect on students' spiritual and moral development.
57. Governors are completely behind the headteacher in his push to ensure excellence in spiritual and moral development; they have a good knowledge of the school and play a very good part in ensuring that students are treated equally and receive the education to which they are entitled.
58. Most other aspects of leadership and management are good. The school has coped well with the huge turnover in staff this year, although some faculties, such as English, have had so many new teachers that they are yet to gel into a really effective team. On the other hand, the senior manager responsible

for the pastoral support of students is a very good leader who has ensured that the quality of pastoral care has continued, despite the number of new staff. The school makes very good use of data to analyse its strengths and weaknesses and this area is managed very well indeed by a deputy headteacher. In particular, the data is used to set targets for individual subjects, which are then supported by the school improvement plan.

59. However, some of the actions required to rectify problems have not been implemented swiftly enough, such as those in design and technology, which leaves some heads of faculty aware of problems but with no way of dealing with them because they are beyond the responsibility of a head of faculty. This failure to take action quickly enough in design and technology allows the ethos of the school to be undermined in practice, because the curriculum has been reduced for all by dropping the food technology course in Years 10 and 11 rather than dealing with the root cause of the problem. Similarly, the school is not ensuring that teachers take a sufficiently firm stance with students who arrive late to lessons and have a negative impact on the rest of the class.
60. The awarding of specialist college status has been very well managed. Its influence is felt across the school so that all staff can see the benefits. Further afield, the school has used its status to build on its already noteworthy links with other schools in order to provide benefits to both St Thomas Aquinas and its partners.
61. The arrangements to induct and support new teachers on entry to the school are good. Clear systems are established to identify lines of communication and support, with objectives to focus on how teachers will contribute to supporting whole-school commitment to improving teaching and learning. Targets are set for subjects and individuals, and are used to build personal profiles of performance and professional development. This helps identify training needs, the outcomes of which are evaluated and shared with other teachers in order to enhance students' achievement. Lesson observations form an integral part of the process and are used to support school improvement and teachers' professional development. Other school personnel are similarly incorporated into the improvement process as it exists for teachers.
62. The leadership and management of special educational needs are good. The school provides a variety of activities to assist students learn or improve their behaviour. It is strongly committed to giving these students the opportunity to benefit fully from the school's facilities. The work of support assistants is well co-ordinated and a good team spirit prevails.

Sixth form

The leadership, management and governance of the sixth form are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school goes to great lengths to ensure that students are treated equally.

Commentary

63. The improvement in the sixth form has mirrored that in the main school, because the systems that are used are the same as those in the main school. If anything, the emphasis on equality is better in the sixth form than it is in the main school. This is because of the lengths that the managers of the sixth form go to, to ensure that students are on the correct courses for them. If a student would be better off at a different institution, it is the school that will often make the contact and help with the application. The school also goes further than usual in managing

courses for students who also work. As a result of this emphasis on the individual, very few students drop out of a course and the number has fallen still further since the introduction of taster days.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,876,855	Balance from previous year	113,938
Total expenditure	3,762,917	Balance carried forward to the next	227,876
Expenditure per student	2,894		

64. The finances in both the main school and the sixth form are very well managed. The school receives below average funding, yet provides a good education. Overall the school provides very good value for money and the sixth form's cost effectiveness is good.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement, teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11.
- Students have very good attitudes. In particular, students in Years 10 and 11 work hard at redrafting their work to improve its quality.
- Nearly half the teachers in the faculty are new this year and they have not yet developed consistent approaches and expectations.

Commentary

Examination results

65. In 2003, results at the end of Year 9 were average. Results have improved rapidly over the past three years. In 2003, GCSE results in both English and English literature were above average.

Standards and achievement

66. Achievement is better in Years 10 and 11 than it is in Years 7 to 9 because the quality of teaching and learning is better.
67. In Years 7 to 9, students' skills in speaking and listening are average. In general, students can express themselves clearly and fully on a one-to one basis, though they tend to express themselves briefly in class. Most can adapt what they say to the circumstances in which they are speaking. Written work mirrors speaking and listening. Many students are able to structure their work well and to express themselves clearly. Higher attainers express themselves accurately, though the work of middle and lower attainers contains errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Standards of reading comprehension are generally good though few students are able to read aloud with good expression.
68. In Years 10 and 11, most students become better able to express themselves orally, are respectful of others, and listen attentively. Higher attainers produce work that is full, well expressed and effectively structured. A particular strength of students' approach is that they re-

draft their work with notable care and so are able to improve its quality. Standards in reading are above average, with many students showing a good understanding of more demanding literature and a lively interest in how social issues are portrayed.

Teaching and learning

69. When teaching is most effective, teachers mark students' work very thoroughly, especially in Years 10 and 11, and give them detailed feedback on what they need to do to improve. This is coupled with high expectations of students: that they will want to improve and that they will be prepared to work determinedly to raise their standards. Students respond well to this challenge and take pride in their achievements. When lessons are well planned, the resources selected enable teachers to make lessons lively and relevant and there is sufficient variety to engage and involve students throughout the lesson, then students concentrate well and make rapid progress. Students learn more quickly when they are involved in activities, such as well-planned group discussion, whilst progress is slower when they are required to be relatively passive. In the best lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to demonstrate to students how a task should be performed. In one very good lesson seen, this process was made all the more effective by the teacher's skilled use of an interactive whiteboard. Such enthusiasm and confidence communicate themselves to students, who also have a benchmark against which to judge their own performance. Students' very good attitudes make an important contribution to their good achievement.
70. When the teaching is less effective or unsatisfactory, the pace of the work is too slow, tasks are not adequately explained or demonstrated, and this results in students becoming noisy and restless. When teachers' planning and methods do not ensure that all the time in the lesson is used to advantage, the result is that lessons 'fade' towards the end, with students becoming restless and learning little. On occasions the tasks set are not sufficiently challenging to enable students to make rapid progress. Some of the marking is superficial and does not help students to improve.

Leadership and management

71. The acting head of faculty has been in post a short time. She is a very good role model as a teacher and has a vision of how standards could be raised further. However, nearly half the teachers in the faculty were relatively new to the school at the time of the inspection and they had not yet developed consistency in their approaches and expectations. This has a particular impact in Years 7 to 9, where new teachers carry out more teaching and there are more classes that are shared between teachers.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

72. Standards of literacy are above average so students have access to the National Curriculum without difficulty. Students generally express themselves clearly in speaking and writing, and are able to use subject-specific vocabulary effectively. Most students read with good understanding.
73. The faculties work well together to promote literacy across the curriculum and good opportunities are provided for students to develop their skills. However, there are some inconsistencies of approach, particularly with respect to marking and the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Modern foreign languages

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	French: average	French: above average German: well above average
Achievement	French: satisfactory	French: good German: good
Teaching and learning	French: satisfactory	French: satisfactory German: good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are very well prepared for the examination and boys achieve well.
- Students produce good writing for their coursework.
- Students' oral work is less consistently well developed, especially pronunciation.
- Marking and feedback in lessons do not always tell students what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

Examination results

74. In French, examination results were above average in 2003. Over the past three years, results have fluctuated in French, being below average in 2002 and well above average in 2001. Many more students are entered for French than is the case nationally. In German all students achieved at least a grade B but numbers are too small to make valid comparisons with national statistics. In both subjects boys do better than would be expected nationally.

Standards and achievement

75. By the end of Year 9, students are working at the level that would be expected of them nationally in French, which represents satisfactory achievement. This is not, however, reflected in the National Curriculum levels that students are awarded, which have not been properly checked. The school has begun to use the national framework for modern languages and this is beginning to have a beneficial effect on achievement in Year 7, especially in students' ability to use longer and more complex language. Students are mostly confident when listening to tapes on familiar topics and can understand passages of written French. On the whole, students' speaking skills are slightly less well developed than their writing skills as they get less practice at these in class. Most can manage three tenses and give their opinions on a range of topics by the end of Year 9. All of the different groups of students make satisfactory progress. At this stage there is little noticeable difference in the achievement of the boys compared to the girls. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because they receive appropriate help from the learning support assistants. Teachers are aware of their needs and mostly plan well to help them, giving them support when necessary. Higher attaining students make good progress as they have opportunities to work on challenging activities.

76. By the end of Year 11, students' skills are above average in French; they achieve well because they have very good attitudes and they are well prepared for the examination. In German, students are achieving well, especially the boys, even though they have not been learning the language for as long. They show very good commitment, attending after-school classes and doing work independently of the teacher. In both languages, higher attainers, and especially the boys, perform particularly well in writing as they enjoy the opportunity to do coursework, producing some good quality work but they do little creative work. Students have well-developed listening skills as they have plenty of practice listening to tapes. Reading is not as well developed in class but students are beginning to have access to a wider range of extended and authentic texts. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress; teachers are aware of their needs and support them well. Speaking is the weakest skill, especially for the lower and middle ability students who often have poor pronunciation and fluency.

Teaching and learning

77. Although there is some very good and excellent teaching, there is also some that is unsatisfactory in French. In German, teaching is good.
78. In almost all lessons students know what they will be expected to have done by the end of the lesson and get on with their work purposefully. Teachers plan lessons that have clear objectives, use carefully selected resources and are skilled at teaching to the requirements of the GCSE examination.
79. Most teachers use French or German to explain tasks very clearly which means that students are exposed to a lot of language and develop good listening skills but there are a few occasions when teachers do not explain clearly and use English too often. In the best lessons, teachers use a range of activities, including games and songs, that motivate students, but in a weaker lesson students spent a whole hour listening to the teacher who had given them all the answers on a sheet. In other weaker lessons, students spend too little time practising the oral work in particular, whereas in the better lessons students spend much of their time doing this in pairs and groups.
80. Generally teachers provide carefully structured lessons, which build up students' understanding and which allow students a wide variety of opportunities to practise speaking and writing. Students also have opportunities to use language spontaneously or to work from memory, but this is not always the case. Relationships between staff and students are good, students know that they are expected to work hard and most teachers deal with minor instances of lack of attention well. Teachers use ICT effectively to make their presentations of teaching points clear and, when they have access to the equipment, ICT is used well to give students access to websites with authentic French materials. Students' spoken work is not always corrected well enough, with errors in pronunciation going unchecked. Students' work is marked and but students are not always told exactly what they have to do to improve.

Leadership and management

81. Examination results are monitored and compared to national standards so teachers know what improvements are needed: results have risen from 2002 to 2003 and are consistently well above average in German. The curriculum has been adapted effectively, for example by introducing a

coursework element to improve writing skills, and this has also contributed to the rise in results at GCSE. There is, however, some inconsistency of approach, and therefore some inconsistency in the quality of teaching, which was noted at the last inspection and has not yet been addressed.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 7 to 11 as a result of good teaching.
- Students study GCSE statistics in addition to mathematics in Years 10 and 11.
- Higher attaining students could still be challenged further to reach their potential.
- The head of faculty provides good leadership and management of a strong, hard-working department.

Commentary

Examination results

82. Results in the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average and were an improvement upon those of 2002. The GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and were slightly higher than those in 2002.

Standards and achievement

83. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 11 as a result of good teaching. By the end of Year 9, students' numerical skills are above average. In Year 9, higher attaining students can find the n^{th} term of a quadratic sequence and use trial and improvement methods well. The lower attainers can read and plot co-ordinates with reasonable accuracy. In Year 11, higher attaining students can use both standard deviation and Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient, in their GCSE statistics coursework. The lower attaining students can use scatter graphs to represent data in their coursework.

Teaching and learning

84. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of mathematics. The three-part lesson structure is used and students respond well to this, making good gains in their learning. However, higher attaining students could be challenged even further to achieve their potential. In the better lessons, as in one Year 8 class on data handling, students' skills in working together were developed well. They were challenged in pairs to confirm statistical definitions and then feed back to the rest of the class their understanding. This allowed the teacher to see

who was achieving and who needed support. Some teachers mark books well, explaining exactly what is needed to improve, but this is not always the case. Students' assessment of their own work is embryonic and does not yet fully support students' understanding of how well they are doing. Teachers often use ICT in lessons and students are able to enhance their mathematical skills through the use of various software packages. In one Year 9 lesson, students reinforced well their understanding of Pythagoras' theorem through a revision program. However, the provision of homework is variable and the recording and completion of the work are inconsistent, which work against raising achievement.

Leadership and management

85. The head of faculty provides good leadership and management of a department which works hard to raise standards. He provides a good role model with a clear vision for the department to move forward. There is good evaluation of examination performance, which helps both planning and target setting. However, schemes of work do not support teachers sufficiently in their use of lesson starters and finishes or in the challenge for higher attaining students, especially for independent learning. Monitoring of both teaching and students' work takes place; however, this is insufficient to support and develop teachers well enough to raise standards even further. Students study GCSE statistics in addition to mathematics in Years 10 and 11. The higher attaining students are fast-tracked and take their statistics examination whilst in Year 10. Many extra clubs and activities are provided. Very good links exist with the primary feeder schools and this includes their participation in the school's Maths 24 Games Challenge. Standards have improved considerably since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

86. The teaching of mathematics as a basic skill in all subjects is satisfactory. The mathematics department has delivered a training session to other subjects on the teaching and learning of mathematics. Some subjects, such as science, have been supported with documentation on commonality of numerical approaches and when topics are being taught. However, the co-ordination and support given to other subjects so far are insufficient to really push up standards across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do better in GCSE science than might be expected in relation to their standards when they enter the school.

- All students gain at least a pass grade in GCSE double award science. This represents especially good achievement by lower attainers.
- Teachers make good use of the techniques suggested by the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.
- A few teachers do not ensure that all students are listening when the teacher is speaking.

Commentary

Examination results

87. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, results were above the national average, continuing the upward trend of recent years. Boys did better in these tests than girls. Results in the 2003 GCSE double award science examinations were well above average and better than the results for 2002.

Standards and achievement

88. All students, including the lowest attainers, have at least a satisfactory basic knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. In higher sets, students regularly achieve standards that are well above average and, sometimes, very high. Students do better in their investigative coursework than they do in other aspects of the science course. This is partly the result of teachers' vigilance in ensuring that all students complete the necessary investigations but also an indication of the care that almost all students take with their written work, including graphs and calculations.

89. At the end of Year 11, students do better in GCSE examinations than might be expected in relation to their standards when they joined the school. Hence their overall achievement by the age of 16 is good. Lower attainers do particularly well and, in 2003, all gained at least a pass grade in double award science. There is a marked improvement in the standards of these students' work between Year 7 and Year 9 and then they are well supported and encouraged in Years 10 and 11 when some of them are rather reluctant to make the necessary effort.

Teaching and learning

90. Teachers generally have good knowledge of their subject and lessons are very carefully planned to provide a good variety of activities to hold students' interest. The pace of most lessons is good and students learn quickly. Teachers make good use of the various aspects of the Key Stage 3 strategy, particularly in the activities they provide for the end of the lesson. In various lessons, students experienced question-and-answer sessions, jigsaws to complete, a 'Who am I?' game and a 'true or false' exercise. All these activities were enjoyable and very effective in reinforcing what students needed to remember from the lesson. Some 'starter' activities, at the beginning of the lesson, are less successful because a few students arriving late to the lesson interrupt the learning of other students.

91. Where teaching is very good, teachers are enthusiastic and extremely well organised; explanations and instructions are given very clearly but students are also encouraged to learn for themselves. The most common weakness, in the few lessons that are satisfactory rather than good or very good, is that the teacher does not insist on students fully listening and concentrating when he or she is talking to the class. In the occasional unsatisfactory lesson, the teacher does not fully understand the topic of the lesson and gives students incorrect information.

92. Students occasionally make use of computers to obtain information, to prepare presentations or to write up coursework. Teachers sometimes use a computer simulation or data logging experiment. However, the faculty is aware that it does not yet make sufficient regular use of ICT in science lessons.

Leadership and management

93. The head of faculty leads by example, in both her enthusiasm for the subject and the quality of her own teaching. The faculty works well together as a team and their efforts, guided by very good development planning, have produced a significant improvement in standards. The faculty has good systems for monitoring and supporting teachers' work but the systems are not yet entirely successful in ensuring that all lessons in the faculty are consistently good or better. GCSE results were average at the time of the previous inspection. They are now well above average. Hence the faculty has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Below average	Below average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Satisfactory

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn well in Years 7 to 9 as a result of good teaching.
- Visionary leadership has resulted in significant progress being made in a short time.
- Students in Year 11 are not achieving the standards of which they are capable owing to deficiencies in previous years.
- The team of technicians provides really valuable support that helps students' learning.
- Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs do not always achieve as well as they could because teachers sometimes underestimate what they are capable of.

Commentary

Examination results

94. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were below average. Students did worse in ICT than nearly all of their other subjects. Significantly more boys than girls took the examination and girls did not do as well as the boys.

Standards and achievement

95. By the end of Year 9, students' use of spreadsheets and the Internet are average although their ability to use computers to create complex formulas is well below average because they have not had enough previous experience of computers. Higher attainers are confident users of word processing and presentation software. Their understanding of the theory associated with the subject is much weaker and there are chunks of knowledge missing. National resources are now being used very well and are helping to raise standards and this is evident particularly in Years 7 and 8 where standards are higher than previous years. Standards remain below average in

Year 9, because provision has not been good enough in the past. Boys and girls achieve similarly. In Year 10 all students follow either the GCSE or the applied GCSE examination course. In Year 11 students either study an examination course or follow an accredited key skills course. Achievement is unsatisfactory because they have not had enough coverage of the course requirements or had enough experience of computers earlier in their education. By the end of Year 11, students' skills are below average because they have underachieved for several years. There are significantly more boys than there are girls on the examination courses and girls' achievement is worse than that of the boys. Their understanding of the theory associated with the subject is not as well developed as their practical skills. Higher attainers can use the absolute cell references and the 'IF' function well when using databases whilst the lower attainers struggle with copying formulae into several cells. Students with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11 do not achieve as well as they do in Years 7 to 9 because teachers underestimate what they are capable of and give them work which is too easy so that they become bored.

Teaching and learning

96. There have been very recent changes to the staffing of the subject and the quality has much improved, to the extent that learning in lessons is now satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and good in Years 7 to 9. Teaching can be exciting and enthusiastic. Students benefit from committed teachers who are very keen to try out new technologies and resources to enhance their students' development. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject; they use this well to really challenge students and ask searching questions. For example, in a Year 7 class, the teacher used quick-fire questioning to ensure students discussed and evaluated their work and used paper and glue to build mock posters for their project, all the time ensuring it was fit for purpose and aimed at the correct audience. Relationships are good and students enjoy using the up-to-date computers. Most teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and also how students should behave. They circulate the class throughout the lesson to monitor progress and to challenge students further. This improved teaching is having a very positive impact on students' learning and achievement but has not yet had enough time to raise achievement of the students in Years 10 and 11. In the weaker lessons teachers misjudge the capabilities of students and do not match work to the students' needs well enough so that the pace of learning is much slower. Teachers often spend time showing students what to do rather than allowing them to work it out for themselves. The support from the learning support assistants is variable, ranging from really helpful to other occasions where the assistant does almost nothing.

Leadership and management

97. Very good leadership has enabled the department to make very good progress, from an unsatisfactory position to a position of strength. Recent changes to the leadership and management of the subject have brought with them a new lease of life for the department. The way forward is clear and there is a shared determination to raise standards. Accurate analysis of examination and performance data is used very well to judge what aspects need to be focused on to ensure students achieve as well as possible. The full effect of this has yet to be seen. The support from the five technicians is very effective and ensures that systems operate to maximum capacity and that disruption to learning is minimal. The time allocated to the subject is now much better and this, combined with the improved teaching and leadership, is having a positive effect on standards and achievement, particularly in Years 7 and 8.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. The use of computers in other areas of the curriculum is good and improving as a result of the school's recent designation as a specialist college for mathematics and computing. It is extremely well managed. The ratio of students to computers is better than the national average; this allows students the opportunity to use individual computers in discrete ICT lessons as well as allowing them to practise their skills in other subjects. The school provides every teacher with a laptop computer to aid their teaching. There are interactive whiteboards in a small but increasing number of classrooms to allow students the chance to actively take part in lessons. In many subjects the Internet is used well for research and appropriate information is selected and presented using word-processing and publishing software. ICT is used particularly effectively in design and technology for computer-aided design and manufacturing and in history for research and problem-solving work. Some subjects struggle to gain access to the ICT rooms and they do not get the same opportunities to use computers. Students do not use computers in music lessons and so are unable to create, refine and modify the music they create. In science and modern languages not enough use is made of computers so students miss out on a valuable dimension to their work. There are very strong links with the community and partner schools. A technician from the school works predominantly in the partner primary schools; much use is made of the ICT facilities outside the school day.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good teaching.
- The arrangements to assess performance are good and ensure students know how to improve.
- The schemes of work for students in Years 10 and 11 do not give enough information about the planning of work.

Commentary

Examination results

99. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination results were above average and higher attaining students reached much higher standards against the national average. The results show an improving trend over recent years.

Standards and achievement

100. By the end of Year 9, students have a good range of geographical skills and knowledge of topics. They plot and interpret data in climate studies, for example, although for a minority accuracy is reduced because work is untidy and errors are made in plotting data. Students make rapid progress when they enter the school. In Year 7, for example, many show very good achievement in work on Antarctica and standards of written work are above average, particularly in re-drafted assignments. Weaknesses are evident, however, in grammatical accuracy of the day-to-day work of some students. By the end of Year 11, students build on map and graphical skills and apply them well in GCSE coursework. They make gains of knowledge and understanding through the use of ICT to research topics. Above average standards are evident in work on earthquakes because students use their knowledge of places to explain the processes of formation. A minority of students, however, do not explain answers in enough detail, or use illustrations to support their writing. Occasionally achievement is unsatisfactory because work is incomplete.

Teaching and learning

101. In Years 7 to 9 students are taught by specialist teachers and they achieve well. The aims of lessons are clear and relevant to their needs and aptitudes. Teachers plan lessons well and make very good use of resources. The arrangements to assess standards and track progress are good and this informs students well about how to improve. Work is marked frequently but there are inconsistencies from teacher to teacher in the evaluation of the content and the setting of targets for improvement. Occasionally students do not make enough progress in lessons because of poor attitudes combined with weaknesses in the management of behaviour. In Years 10 and 11 teachers are experienced and manage students well. Time is used well and results in students achieving well. Teachers make very good use of resources, particularly ICT, and it leads to students improving research skills and independent learning. In discussion sessions, however, not enough is expected of students in their explanations and the standards expected in illustrative work are not always given enough attention.

Leadership and management

102. Planning is linked to school and faculty objectives but does not identify enough subject issues and how they will be evaluated. The schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are good, particularly for the contribution to improving literacy skills. The schemes of work in Year 10 and 11, however, give insufficient guidance and are in urgent need of revision. Since the previous inspection GCSE results have remained above average and students continue to achieve well.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have good opportunities to view history in a moral context.
- Research projects in Years 7 to 9 encourage students to analyse the period they study.
- Good teaching enables students to achieve well.
- When teachers dominate lessons at GCSE level, students become dependent on them.
- The monitoring of teaching and marking lacks the rigour needed to ensure consistency.

Commentary

Examination results

103. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were well above the national average and have improved over recent years.

Standards and achievement

104. In Years 7 to 9 students are developing their understanding of the past through the use of source material that enables them to identify different views of events. Achievement is good because teachers encourage students to analyse information and use it to explain why events took place. Students have a good sense of chronology and recognise that a variety of factors may contribute to an event, although they do not usually evaluate them. They write fluently and are willing to make judgements, and higher attaining students relate these to the evidence. Lower attaining students respond accurately to questions; however, their responses are generally brief and do not refer to alternative views.

105. In Year 11 achievement is good because students are prepared well for the examination. They have confidence in their teachers and are willing to listen. Their use of primary sources for information is good, although evaluation of them and consideration of motive and bias are not well developed. They recognise that experiences of historical events are not the same for different groups of people, and can identify the different motives behind support for decisions made. Students are beginning to recognise the value of cartoons in identifying the mood of the time. In essays, they write fluently and demonstrate secure knowledge of the period studied, although some do not always recognise the key elements in the title.

Teaching and learning

106. Students in Years 7 to 9 benefit from lively and imaginative teaching that encourages them to think about the periods they study. Research projects encourage students to analyse the period they study and to become independent learners. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding and this enables them to add colourful detail and clear explanations. In the best lessons teachers ensure that students make links with earlier learning; as a result students achieve well and develop their interest in the topics studied. Lessons have clear objectives and quick starter activities provide good reasons for students to arrive promptly. Teachers encourage students to present information in imaginative ways and as a result they develop understanding. A good example is the letter sent home from a visitor to Germany during the Nazi period. Many students demonstrated a very good recognition of the fear that existed beneath the smiles of ordinary Germans.

107. Students studying for the GCSE examination become dependent and less involved when teachers dominate the lessons and relevant information is delivered rather than discovered by the student. They are well supported in their work through carefully staged worksheets and the use of GCSE style questions. There are few opportunities, however, for students to

develop their understanding of the examination criteria through the use of examination questions.

Leadership and management

108. The subject mirrors the aims of the school in its reflective approach to the past and the moral questions that it raises. Schemes of work are imaginative and encourage students to seek answers about the past. Examination results are reviewed annually and analysed to identify the level of achievement. The increased use of ICT as a teaching tool and for research has enabled the department to make a significant contribution to the work of the school. Teachers share ideas and materials; however, there is insufficient monitoring of teaching and marking to ensure a consistently high quality, and not all groups have the opportunity to investigate the issues identified in the schemes of work. Progress since the previous inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Below average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because of good teaching.
- Students underachieve in food technology as a result of unsatisfactory teaching.
- Students use ICT very effectively in their work.
- Teachers are good role models for students and relationships are very good.
- The curriculum is limited in Years 10 and 11 with lower than average numbers studying design and technology.

Commentary

Examination results

109. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were average. Results have been steadily improving.

Standards and achievement

110. By the end of Year 9, students' practical skills are average but vary considerably between above average and well below average. They are very confident users of ICT. Their computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) work is well above average as are their designs based on Mackintosh. However, students' knowledge of electronics is well below average; this is because teachers have a weak command of the subject and pass on information that is incorrect. Standards in food technology are well below average. Students' use of equipment is weak – they do not know how to chop or cut correctly; they are also unaware of what constitutes good health and safety practice. Students underachieve in food technology because teaching is unsatisfactory.

111. By the end of Year 11, students have an average grasp of graphical products. They know why packaging is an important aspect of marketing. Students' sketch work is rather staid, with insufficient opportunities for students to develop their free work. Students again make effective use of ICT. Students in product design use the CAD/CAM systems very well to produce designs and then to manufacture components. Portfolio work is average. Students research topics well but do not always evaluate their work critically enough. Students' positive attitudes also help them to achieve well.

Teaching and learning

112. Teachers' knowledge of the subject varies from good through to poor. When teaching is most effective, teachers use their knowledge of designers to probe students' understanding of the impact of design on society. For example, in a Year 8 class, lower attainers were asked to analyse and discuss the finer points of Mackintosh's work. The teacher did not accept superficial answers and by the end of the lessons students knew what geometrical shapes are. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and also how students should behave. Relationships are very good and students appreciate the additional hours that teachers are available outside of the normal school day. Marking is good; comments are constructive and help to improve students' achievement.
113. However, when teaching is less than satisfactory, there is poor control of the class. This was the case in a Year 9 food technology class. The teacher lost control of the class and many students ended up with burnt food products or throwing sauce at one another.

Leadership and management

114. Leadership has identified the weaknesses in the department and plans are in place to appoint another food technology teacher. Teaching is monitored well and has enabled the department to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching. Food technology and textiles are not offered within design and technology in Years 10 and 11 and, as a result, far fewer students study design and technology than is the norm. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are similar and teaching remains satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good range of experiences is offered to students.
- Teaching is good and inspires students to good achievement.
- There is good provision for independent learning.

Commentary

Examination results

115. GCSE results were above average in 2003 and continue a rising trend. GNVQ results were high with a significant improvement from 2002 to 2003

Standards and achievement

116. By the end of Year 9 students have good skills in drawing and painting. They can use shading techniques effectively to represent tone and texture. They make very good personal illustrations based on studies of 'Dream-catchers' as in Native American art. As at the time of the previous inspection, printing is particularly good; silk-screen printing of portraits in Year 7 is the most outstanding. Three-dimensional work is also good, especially masks based on studies of African and Chinese cultures and wire sculpture based on work of the artist Giacometti. Clay work lacks finish, partly because the pottery room is being relocated. All these skills and individual personal responses are continued and improved in the GCSE course. Students research and develop their ideas in a range of materials. Etching is very good.
117. The GCSE vocational course is well structured and students have good standards in research and development of ideas, and in craft and manufacturing. The presentation of their work is particularly good. Although perspective is taught formally in Year 9 a significant number of students do not apply this learning in GCSE. There is good use of ICT for research and for the manipulation of images, in Years 7 to 9, and in GCSE. Students are taught the correct art vocabulary and there is good attention to improving skills in literacy.

Teaching and learning

118. Teachers have good knowledge and expertise in the subject and have high expectations of their students. They give clear demonstrations and illustrations of what is to be achieved in lessons and this enables students to be confident and to work at a good pace. They encourage students to be creative and imaginative and to respond to topics in a personal way, thus promoting independent learning. They create a very good climate for learning, expecting and getting the highest standards of attention and behaviour from their students. Assessment is good in all years. Students are involved in self-assessment and know what they have to do to improve. All students get good one-to-one support in lessons and all make equally good progress.

Leadership and management

119. Art is taught within the design and technology faculty and benefits from the wider vision and range of resources. Planning is clear and concise. There is good teamwork and mutual support and good use of visiting artists to extend provision. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards and achievement have improved by Year 9 and in GCSE.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have good attitudes and achieve well, as teaching is good.
- While ongoing marking and monitoring are good, assessment information is underused to identify areas for improvement.
- Music makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, particularly through performances in masses.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT in music.

Commentary

Examination results

120. There were too few students studying music to allow comparison with national statistics in 2003.

Standards and achievement

121. In all years, students use key musical vocabulary well and listen perceptively to recordings and their peers. By the end of Year 9 higher attaining students perform well in groups, co-ordinating chords, rhythms and melody well, and developing improvisations around given structures, such as the blues. Lower attaining students, while technically less adept, express moods and intentions well in their composition. By Year 11, students are able performers on a range of instruments and compose with sensitivity to form, tonality and texture. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys or girls or of any minority ethnic groups, but, contrary to national trends, boys outnumber girls in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs also achieve well.

Teaching and learning

122. Teaching cultivates a good climate for learning. Good management of behaviour and clear routines lead to constructive and productive relationships within lessons, especially in paired and group practical work. Lively presentational skills engage students' interest. Continuity is fostered through starting activities which consolidate previous learning. Teaching methodology is less consistent: while good strategies keep students focused in group work, explanations lack sufficient musical illustration and students are sometimes expected to perform before they have a clear aural image in their mind of what is required. This can lead to repetition and students becoming restless. In Years 10 and 11 lessons are well tailored to meet the expectations of examination. Here students rise well to the challenge of taking responsibility for their own learning, developing very positive attitudes. Good supplementary support by the visiting instrumental teachers helps overcome the shortage of time allocated to the GCSE course. The quality of marking, monitoring and support is also better than in Years 7 to 9, where expectations made of higher attaining students in class are not always sufficiently challenging.

Leadership and management

123. The quality of education is now much better than that at the time of the previous inspection. In a short time staff have built a strong team spirit, using new and well-balanced schemes of work, expanding the modest but very musical extra-curricular groups, and strongly underpinning the spiritual life of the school through co-ordinating the regular, uplifting performances at school and parish masses. There is a good range of supplementary activities to support GCSE and

talented students, but no liaison with primary feeder schools. The department does not use assessment data to analyse and address areas of strength and weakness. Informal mutual observation and team teaching are good, but formal moderation of students' work to bring greater consistency in assessment is lacking. Using ICT to support learning has barely improved and students do not get enough opportunities to work with computers. Nevertheless, given that music was found to be unsatisfactory and a key issue for the school at the time of the previous inspection, very good progress has been made.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership provides clear vision and direction for the subject.
- The school is close to achieving the aim of the national strategy for all students to have at least two hours a week of high-quality physical education.
- The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is not fully inclusive.
- The strong extra-curricular programme gives all students, particularly the gifted and talented, the opportunity to excel in school and beyond.

Commentary

Examination results

124. The 2003 GCSE examination results were above average.

Standards and achievement

125. By Year 9, standards in team games are average, reflecting good achievement in relation to the students' starting point on entering the school. Girls achieve well in netball, and boys in football. Students with special needs, and those with English as an additional language, are well integrated and achieve as well as other students.

126. By Year 11 standards remain average overall, but achievement is good because students have embarked on new courses, well illustrated by girls in aerobics. Boys achieve exceptionally well in volleyball. Standards in GCSE coursework are above average, as seen in dance and games. Students show a good understanding of theoretical aspects, well illustrated in a lively and knowledgeable discussion about issues surrounding sponsorship in sport. Standards in extra-

curricular sport are high, reflected in students' many achievements in dance, girls' and boys' football and athletics.

Teaching and learning

127. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers motivate students, and create a very good climate for learning. This is particularly evident in the high levels of participation, standards of dress and very good behaviour seen in lessons. Students have very good attitudes; they put good physical effort into their work and support extra-curricular activities well. Good teaching combines pace, challenge and high expectations to ensure students are actively involved in well-planned, interesting activities, and learn well. However, the best learning occurs when there is a constant demand on students to do better, with the teacher making a consistent emphasis on quality and improvement. This leads to very good learning, well illustrated by the achievement of boys in volleyball, and girls in extra-curricular dance. Overall, there are limited opportunities for students to take a share of responsibility for their own learning, and thereby gain independence. Teachers do not pay enough attention to reinforcing standards of literacy, numeracy and use of ICT.

Leadership and management

128. Very good leadership provides clear vision and direction for the subject. The recently appointed head of faculty lost no time in undertaking a comprehensive review of the faculty, and has already put in place many improvements aimed at raising standards. Existing strengths, such as the successful extra-curricular programme, have been maintained, and new initiatives introduced to strengthen the curriculum and assessment. Work still needs to be done in these areas, such as making the curriculum fully inclusive by giving boys access to dance in Years 7 to 9. Accommodation remains a problem. Precious time is wasted travelling to the playing fields off site and this has a negative impact on standards and achievement. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards are higher in Years 10 and 11 and the quality of teaching is much improved.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

	Year 11
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results improved significantly in 2003 after a change of examination board.
- Useful additional lesson and tutorial time is provided after school on a weekly basis.

- There are not enough case study materials for the applied GCSE course.

Commentary

Examination results

129. Results improved significantly, to above the national average, in 2003 when the department changed its examination board and coursework grades improved.

Standards and achievement

130. Students show a clear understanding of business ideas and processes. Year 10 students following the applied GCSE course show an in-depth understanding of fixed and variable costs and start-up and running costs. They can create break-even charts and use them to calculate revenue. When examining costs incurred when setting up a hair salon they could estimate total costs with reference to differing numbers of clients, create graphs to show the relationship of numbers of clients and total costs, and estimate potential profits and losses. Students in Year 11 display knowledge and skills beyond what might typically be expected. They can all accurately use data on cash inflow and outflow and calculate opening and closing balances.

Teaching and learning

131. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Aims of lessons are clear and relevant to students' needs. Lessons are planned thoroughly. Over a period of time, students' work demonstrates that the range of teaching methods used is varied and students are therefore able to develop different ways of working. Year 11 students thoroughly enjoyed discovering the difference between cashflow and profit in a lesson when the teacher skilfully used a variety of effective methods, which encouraged and engaged all. However, there are not enough resources available to students to help them understand the case studies used in the applied GCSE.

Leadership and management

132. Whilst there is a focus on improving standards there is not enough analysis of departmental practices and the strategies for raising higher level attainment are not being shared. Business education was not reported on at the time of the previous inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship, personal and social development are well integrated. The weekly tutor period together with English, geography, history and religious education contribute to the development of citizenship.

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have good opportunities to take part in active citizenship, which leads to good achievement.
- The Catholic ethos of the school actively promotes elements of good citizenship.
- Citizenship is not made sufficiently explicit within subjects and few staff have received training for teaching the subject.
- Assessment procedures do not sufficiently inform the progress that students are making.

Commentary

Examination results

133. Students do not follow an examination course in citizenship.

Standards and achievement

134. By the end of Years 9 and 11 students show average skills of knowledge, understanding and enquiry. In small groups Year 9 students discuss issues, like the power of television commercials and their impact on society. However, the conventions of debate are not yet well established. Year 11 students have a basic understanding of human rights and the freedom of speech. They share their records of achievement and use computers to produce their statements. However, elements of government, like law making and democracy studied in Years 7 to 9, are less well developed in Years 10 and 11. Students from Years 7 to 11 successfully demonstrate the skills of participating and taking responsible action. These are well developed and as a consequence all students achieve well. This is exemplified through whole-year residential experiences, projects that raise money for a local special school and schools in South Africa, the 'Listening to views programme' and the commitment to anti-racism. These are planned citizenship activities where whole year groups all successfully participate. Although standards are average the thread of active citizenship, being responsible citizens, runs through the ethos of the school leading to good achievement by all students.

Teaching and learning

135. Long-term planning is good, which ensures consistency of the programme for students. However, the subject is reliant on a large team of form tutors teaching the personal, social education and citizenship programmes and teachers do not always challenge lateness to lessons. The teachers' limited subject knowledge and understanding of the citizenship programme, at times, constrains students' learning. For instance, in Year 8 the different responsibilities of local and national government were not correctly explained. Teaching methods encourage students to express their opinions and challenge the opinions of others, as seen in Year 7 lessons where small groups decide their preferred leadership style. Subjects do not make citizenship sufficiently explicit and as a result students are not aware that they are becoming better-informed citizens. However, the expansive and well-planned enrichment programme, undertaken by whole year groups, means that students are successfully developing the skills of enquiry, participation and acting responsibly. The way that marks are collated and inconsistent marking mean that teachers and students are not aware of the progress they make in the three different strands of citizenship.

Leadership and management

136. The citizenship co-ordinator gives good clear vision and status for the subject. The citizenship curriculum is well planned, with distinct modules in personal and social education and other subjects. Few staff have received training for teaching citizenship; teachers rely upon their own knowledge. Consequently the three strands of citizenship are insufficiently linked. At present, monitoring, marking and assessment of citizenship are not consistent enough to check students' progress. Citizenship was not a curriculum subject at the time of the last report.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	12	100	98.6	50.0	50.2	88.3	87.5
Biology	13	100	96.4	61.5	39.2	89.2	78.6
Business studies	11	100	98.7	27.3	36.8	76.4	80.1
Chemistry	6	83.3	97.6	0.0	49.0	60.0	84.9
English	19	100	99.4	36.8	36.3	83.2	80.9
English literature	11	100	99.5	72.7	46.5	98.2	86.5
General studies	7	100	94.7	28.6	31.0	80.0	73.1
Geography	7	100	98.7	28.6	44.5	68.6	84.0
History	13	100	99.0	30.8	44.6	80.0	84.6
Information technology	6	100	95.6	16.7	24.6	66.7	69.5
Mathematics	7	85.7	96.7	42.9	55.6	77.1	84.7
Media studies	23	100	99.4	34.8	37.8	79.1	82.1
Physics	5	60.0	96.7	20.0	44.6	36.0	81.7
Sociology	19	89.5	98.2	42.1	44.3	74.7	83.6
Sports studies	12	100	98.0	33.3	30.9	81.7	75.2

The school recruits viable numbers for all courses and the retention rate is high for all subjects.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus for this report was on English and French, although German was sampled. Teaching was good in German and their work shows that students are achieving well.

English literature

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

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in oral and written work.
- Teaching is very good, particularly of critical analysis.
- Students are taught to think for themselves and to be independent learners.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development

Commentary

Examination results

137. Examination results at A-level were well above average in 2003.

Standards and achievement

138. Students have very good knowledge and understanding of literary criticism. They are helped by doing detailed studies of the texts and by the high quality notes given by their teachers. They learn the essence of powerful language. They can relate the characteristics of people to their time and situations. They speak with confidence and astuteness about idealism, selfishness, love, passion and fascination in making comparisons between features of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Return of the Native*. They can apply their learning to other texts such as *Othello* and *Hamlet*. They show a good awareness of dramatic devices in studies of Shakespeare. Writing on poetry is concise and analytical. They show a very good understanding of poetic devices and structures, from the classical to the modern. There is close attention to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural considerations that pervade all the literature studied. Students can relate these well to modern life.

Teaching and learning

139. The teachers have a very good command of the subject. They use very good strategies to promote critical thinking in discussion. This enables students to acquire very good skills in analysis and learn how to support their opinions logically. They ensure that all students can identify and explain the effects of figures of speech and how writers use language effectively.

Marking is carried out in very good depth and detail that enables students to reach the higher grades.

Leadership and management

140. There is very good provision for extending students' vision of literature. There is very good teamwork and the teachers support each other fully. Students' learning is enhanced by visits to the theatre, the debating society and lectures at the local university. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection; standards have improved significantly and teaching has improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

141. Standards of language and literacy are average and students are equipped to meet the demands of their subjects.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Above average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well because they are given plenty of support and regularly work with authentic materials.
- Students write well for their coursework and are well prepared for the examination.
- Teachers do not always exploit opportunities for students to work independently.

Commentary

Examination results

142. No students were entered for the A Level examination in 2003 or 2002.

Standards and achievement

143. Standards on the current AS course are above average; students are making good progress given what would be expected from their GCSE results. In the A LEVEL course, the number of students is very small; achievement is good. By the end of Year 12, students are achieving well because they are given plenty of support and regularly work with authentic materials. They improve their spoken French by working with the foreign language assistant and by attending courses, so that can use their spoken language regularly. In Year 13 the students increase the range of topics they feel confident about and are able to discuss topics such as transport and the environment, showing a good knowledge of how this affects French-speaking countries. Their

coursework writing is good and their arguments develop during the course so that they can present their case convincingly and their accuracy improves.

Teaching and learning

144. Students are well prepared for the examination; teachers know the requirements well and make sure that students know how to get good marks. They are expected to listen to tapes regularly and are sometimes given tapes to listen to at home to help them prepare for the examination, for example. Students are well challenged; for example, they are given some complicated authentic passages to read and understand. Students complete homework diligently and work hard at home to research topics in more depth so that they come to lessons well prepared. Teachers conduct lessons almost entirely in French so students develop improved listening skills and learn some accurate pronunciation. Students are aware of what they need to do to improve; they get good advice on written work which helps them to write more accurately. The pace of lessons is good, resources are well chosen to be topical and interesting and ICT is used when possible to give students access to authentic articles so that students learn about current events and the culture of France. Students generally organise their work well and use their files well when revising but teachers sometimes miss opportunities to allow students to work independently, for example by controlling tape recorders themselves and deciding how they will revise language they have learnt previously.

Leadership and management

145. The quality of leadership and management is good. The course content is regularly reviewed to make sure it meets the requirements of the examination board and reflects current events in France. Progress since the last inspection has been good and the quality of teaching has improved. The course is adapted to take account of the types of students entering and examination results are carefully analysed so that any weaknesses are quickly remedied.

MATHEMATICS

The focus was on mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Insufficient evidence

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good methods of monitoring and tracking achievement so that students can see how they are progressing and what they need to do to improve.
- There are very good links with universities.
- Schemes of work are not developed sufficiently to give teachers guidelines on teaching methods and resources.
- Teachers do not always match the work closely enough to the needs of higher attaining students.

Commentary

Examination results

146. Results at A-level were below average in 2003.

Standards and achievement

147. Standards are currently better than those suggested by examination results, because standards on entry to the course vary from year to year. The quality of students' written and oral work is better than that usually seen at this stage in the course and the quality of the pure mathematics' coursework is well above that usually seen. Students make good use of past work when introduced to new topics. They have a good understanding of the laws for constant acceleration and Newton's laws and can apply them appropriately. Understanding of vectors is good. In the statistics module in Year 13, students demonstrate a good understanding of the Poisson distribution and can apply it very well and accurately to calculate probabilities. Several students have more gaps in their attendance than is usual, so they are not making the sort of progress expected on an A-level course.

Teaching and learning

148. Teachers have a good knowledge of mathematics. They give good support with clear explanations when students ask for clarification and this allows students to improve their understanding. In the better lessons, students are encouraged to participate in discussions, responding well to questions and volunteering suggestions in articulate ways. However, in a minority of lessons, there are missed opportunities to involve students more actively in lessons. Students respond well and have positive attitudes to the subject. Teachers generally plan their lessons well, but insufficient challenge is built into lessons for higher attaining students so that they can achieve their full potential. Lessons are prepared well to make topics relevant to everyday life. However, there are not enough opportunities for students to develop their study skills by encouraging them to read about topics in preparation for lessons. The marking of students' work contains good diagnostic comments that show students where they have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

149. Sound leadership and good management are rooted in effective consultation and collaboration amongst teachers. Teachers work well together. The wide range of topics within the mathematics curriculum provides students with good opportunities to study new areas of the subject, ensuring that interest and motivation is maintained and extended. There are very good links with universities that enhance the mathematics curriculum and provide the gifted and talented students with challenging work. They inspire students to think mathematically and to look beyond the confines of the syllabus. Although there is a comprehensive programme of study that follows the published syllabuses, the schemes of work lack guidance on appropriate teaching methods and use of resources, including ICT, that would enhance the teaching further. There are good procedures for assessing the students' performance as they progress through the sixth form. There is insufficient information in the previous report to make a judgement on progress since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

150. Competence in mathematics is good. In ICT students use their mathematical skills effectively. Understanding of indices is good and used well in calculations. In design and technology, students use their skills in statistics well and have a good understanding of conversion of units.

SCIENCE

The focus for this report was on chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. Teaching in the biology and physics lessons was good and students were clearly achieving well.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject and its applications are good.
- Lessons are well planned and use a variety of methods that motivate students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- The department does not provide a permanent record, through diagnostic comments in marking, of what students should do in order to improve.

Commentary

Examination results

151. Results were well below average in 2003. However, these results reflect the standards on entry to the course rather than any problems with achievement.

Standards and achievement

152. Standards seen in Year 12 and Year 13 are better overall than might be expected in relation to the students' GCSE grades and they achieve well. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 generally have better knowledge and understanding of current topics than expected. In a Year 12 group, for example, most students could explain challenging concepts such as dynamic equilibrium involving reversible reactions. In both year groups, students have well-ordered files containing detailed notes of high quality. Material is cross-referenced between topics so that existing knowledge and understanding can be used quickly and successfully in new contexts. Students have good practical and investigative skills.

Teaching and learning

153. Teachers plan lessons well and use a variety of teaching styles. Students enjoy lessons and appreciate having ready access to an alternative explanation of difficult ideas if the first one

does not precisely meet their needs, benefiting from their teachers' good subject knowledge and the positive atmosphere that derives from effective teacher-student relationships.

154. Students have to think hard from the very beginning of a lesson and teachers make sure that students are active learners, with a growing focus on independent learning. Teachers set a variety of homework exercises to reinforce and extend students' learning. They mark tests and scrutinise homework regularly but marking does not give students precise information about how the work could be improved.

Leadership and management

155. The recently appointed head of chemistry provides satisfactory leadership for the course. The two teachers work well together as a team and share a commitment to raising standards. The department is generally able to identify weaknesses and take action to overcome them. The previous inspection report only referred to A-level science in general terms. Hence it is not possible to judge the progress since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus for the inspection was information and communication technology.

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

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn and achieve well because of good teaching.
- Very effective leadership is raising the profile of the subject and has resulted in great improvement since the last inspection.
- Students value the opportunity to use lots of up-to-date computers and software to enhance their learning in a wide range of courses.
- Students often rely too much on teachers rather than thinking for themselves.

Commentary

Examination results

156. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were average. Students can choose between A-level ICT, A-level computing, or accreditation in the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course.

Standards and achievement

157. By the end of Year 12, students have a satisfactory grasp of how a variety of software can be used to support their studies. They can use database, spreadsheet and presentation packages really well. Higher attainers can relate the topics they cover very well to using technology in modern society. By the end of Year 13, students have a secure knowledge of communication networks such as routers and hubs. Their understanding of nomadic networks is not as good although they can relate this well to everyday data transmission such as mobile phone and wireless technology. They build upon prior knowledge well in work that is preparing them to meet specific examination requirements. Students following the computing course and the A-level course achieve well overall. Students taking the ECDL course are also making good progress because they enjoy the flexibility it offers and the instant feedback they receive when using good quality equipment.

Teaching and learning

158. Teaching is characterised by very good knowledge of the subject and very effective planning of lessons. Good relationships ensure a positive atmosphere for learning. All students achieve well because teachers match the work effectively to the needs of every student. Students are generally passive learners and can often rely too much on teacher input. This lack of involvement in their own learning is more evident in Year 13. In the best lessons teachers really stretch students and ask searching questions that make them think very carefully about the wider use of ICT. Through a range of exciting and interesting topics teachers capture the students' enthusiasm and ensure they learn well. Very good use is made of the high quality resources available and the extensive technical support.

Leadership and management

159. Leadership has clarity of vision and a determination to drive up standards. The staff team work very well together and are supported incredibly well by the team of expert technicians which ensures students have always got access to working equipment. Resources are very good so students can always find a computer with access to the school network at anytime of day. The impact of the new management has yet to have full effect on the standards but clear progress has been made in a relatively short time.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

160. Many subjects use computers really well to enhance students' learning and achievement. Because the school has a larger than average number of machines students get lots of opportunities to use computers in a wide range of situations. Students apply and use computers confidently to support their learning. Subject teachers have been trained in using computers, have their own laptops and are generally confident users of ICT, and as a result students use computers far more than at the time of the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

The inspection focused on history, but geography, psychology and sociology were sampled. Teaching was particularly good in the psychology lessons, where the work was demanding and the teacher set a cracking pace. Teaching was good in geography and students are doing well. Teaching was satisfactory in sociology and students were doing as well as expected.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers provide good informal advice to students on their individual progress.
- Information sheets ensure students have the necessary information for their course.
- There are insufficient textbooks and library books for private research and for wider reading.

Commentary

Examination results

161. Results at A-level were average in 2003.

Standards and achievement

162. Students handle sources well and select and extract evidence to support what they learn. They build on earlier work at GCSE and have an increased depth of knowledge about life in Nazi Germany. Essay responses to questions are clear and generally well planned. Higher attaining students present reasoned written arguments and arrive at a balanced judgement that they support with evidence. Lower attaining students identify appropriate information, but answers are more descriptive and contain less analysis. They do not always recognise the requirements of the question and this results in their response not being appropriately focused. Students are beginning to appreciate the need to support statements with precise evidence and to use quotations to add validity.

Teaching and learning

163. Teachers provide students with clear and detailed information on information sheets that include relevant structured questions that enable students to consider important issues relating to their work. This ensures students have the information they need; however, the lack of textbooks for private study and preparation for the next lesson is reducing their independence. The range of supporting texts in the library is limited. Students are not encouraged to read widely through a planned reading programme, in order to enhance their understanding of the topics studied. Where students take responsibility for their learning through group presentations and private research, they gain confidence and achieve well. Students receive good advice on the standard of their essays and how they may be improved. Model essays are provided; however, work that would enable students to become familiar with the requirements of a higher grade is at an early stage.

Leadership and management

164. The quality of leadership and management in the sixth form is satisfactory. Teachers work together to deliver a coherent course and students feel well supported. Teachers make good use of the results to review achievement, but little use is made of them to enable students to monitor their own progress. Links with higher education establishments are limited. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Below average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
------------	------

Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a consequence of good teaching.
- Students use ICT very effectively to support their coursework.
- The subject is becoming more popular because of the good leadership.
- Students' sketch work lacks creativity.

Commentary

Examination results

165. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were below average.

Standards and achievement

166. By the end of Year 12, students have a below average knowledge and understanding of manufacturing techniques. They know that it is important to model a product and to produce a prototype. Their knowledge of the Memphis design influence is good although their understanding of the influence of other designers is below average. Portfolio work is average although sketch work lacks real creativity. Practical skills are average. Students pay good attention to detail and the quality of finish. Students make very good use of ICT; CAD/CAM work is of a high standard.

Teaching and learning

167. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is good. When teaching is most effective, teachers plan their lessons well and use a range of resources effectively. For example, in one Year 13 class, video and commercial products were used to very good effect to get students to discuss product development. Relationships are very good; there is a good deal of trust and students spend a good deal of time working with teachers on projects outside of normal school hours. Marking is good and comments are constructive and help to move students forward.

168. When teaching is less effective, teachers spend too long talking and do not involve students in activities; this slows the learning. Students' attitudes are mixed. They enjoy the subject but some students arrive to lessons late or miss lessons, which disrupts their work, particularly coursework.

Leadership and management

169. The quality of leadership and management is good. Courses are becoming more popular and there is a clear focus on raising the profile of the subject within the school. Progress has been good since the previous inspection; standards are higher and teaching is now good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focused on media studies, but drama, music and performing arts were sampled. Teaching was good in music and performing arts, where students are doing well. Teaching in drama was very good and students are achieving very well.

Media studies

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

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Above average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good and students learn rapidly.
- Students' very good attitudes help them to achieve well.
- The subject is very popular, which reflects well on leadership and management.
- While higher attaining students develop an argument fully, others do not give enough examples to make a point clearly.

Commentary

Examination results

170. In 2003 results in the A-level examination were average.

Standards and achievement

171. Students produce and edit videos, paying careful attention to lighting and camera angles. They use storyboards well in planning activities and essays, and collaborate effectively in group work. They understand stereotyping and representation, employing their knowledge to analyse characters in soap operas. Students draw up bar graphs to convey information, such as the type of advertisement in a particular magazine. They appreciate the technique accounting for the success of films, for example *Trainspotting*, and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. While higher attaining students develop an argument fully, others do not give enough examples to make a point clearly. Some students, however, are not attending regularly and are falling behind in their work.

Teaching and learning

172. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to ask telling questions to assess what students have learnt. However, they sometimes talk for too long in the first half of lessons and allow the same few students to answer all the questions. This slows the pace of learning and does not help to develop independence. In the best lessons, students are actively involved from the outset and are allowed to take the initiative, for example when assembling a video camera and tripod prior to filming a brief scene. Teachers provide detailed notes on structuring an essay, which leads to improvement in written work. They mark assignments carefully and indicate how students can improve the quality of their work. Relationships are very good so that students have very good attitudes to the subject and this helps them to achieve well.

Leadership and management

173. The subject is well co-ordinated so teachers plan well together and moderate coursework thoroughly, sharing expertise. The school has provided, from this year, an AVCE course in the subject to give students who wish to take a more practical course the chance to do so. Media studies is a very popular subject in the sixth form and this reflects well on leadership and management. The subject was not reported on at the last inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The inspection focused on physical education and leisure and recreation.

Leisure and recreation

Provision in leisure and recreation is **good**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good teaching.
- Learning is enhanced through studies that embrace a practical and 'real' world focus.
- The scheme of work does not provide sufficient support for teachers.

Commentary

Examination results

174. The 2003 results were in line with the national average for the AVCE course.

Standards and achievement

175. Year 13 students gain knowledge of the AVCE course units, such as customer services, and show appreciation of the needs and expectations that have to be met to ensure client satisfaction. Students understand the assessment criteria and know what is expected in order to achieve well. They met the required competencies by planning and undertaking a visit to Amsterdam and this brought relevance to their work. Students in Year 12 achieve well in practical work when they plan and test the suitability of proposals to devise a fitness programme in a gym. They record data and use ICT to plot graphs about levels of expected performance against age and sex. The findings are then used to justify the programme changes made. In theoretical studies, however, students do not develop answers enough in discussion or written aspects of study. Assignments are improved through word processing but standards are lower than expected because of grammatical weakness and the failure to support writing with examples.

Teaching and learning

176. Teachers have good experience in planning and teaching the vocational course in leisure and recreation, whilst others use their business experience to support learning. Very good links are established with the leisure community and these are used well to generate enthusiasm and relevance. This is successful; students enjoy their studies and feel a sense of achievement. Teachers encourage the use of ICT and computers are used well to research information, communicate with the leisure industry and write notes and reports. On occasions, however, not enough guidance is given about the quality of explanation expected and how to provide a considered opinion.

Leadership and management

177. Careful planning ensures there is a good match of teachers to the course requirements. Teamwork is good. The broad overview and centrally set assessment criteria give guidance about expectations but the programmes of study have not been developed into a scheme of work and planning is insufficiently focused on meeting the development needs in the subject. In spite of opportunities, however, teachers are not identifying and seeking courses to improve their knowledge and skills. There was no report at the previous inspection.

Physical education

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

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership provides a clear vision of the standards required.
- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- There is no opportunity for all sixth form students to participate in physical activities as part of their enrichment curriculum.

Commentary

Examination results

178. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were above average.

Standards and achievement

179. Year 12 students are achieving very well. They work quickly under pressure, identifying key characteristics of 'motivation', and creating a concise definition within a tight time target. Students' use of ICT in the presentation of their personal fitness portfolios is impressive. In Year 13, students also achieve very well with a new team of teachers. In an animated

discussion on the qualities of leadership, students drew, effectively, on their own experiences, as well as making perceptive observations on current sporting leaders. They relate theory to practice very effectively.

Teaching and learning

180. Very good teaching reflects high expectations, challenge and a demanding pace of learning. Teachers are very knowledgeable, and excellent planning is a feature of all lessons. Dynamic starter activities set the tone of lessons and a range of challenging activities enables students to reflect, take responsibility, make decisions and solve problems. Independent learning skills develop well. Students are highly motivated and work hard; they appreciate the support and guidance they are given on an individual basis. Very good questioning initiates stimulating discussions, well illustrated in a debate on the effects of financial and political pressures on the Olympic Ideal.

Leadership and management

181. Strong leadership ensures that raising standards is central to faculty development planning. The quality of support and guidance given to students is very good. There are no opportunities for all sixth form students to participate in physical activities as part of their enrichment programme. Although they can help with younger students, students regret that there are limited extra-curricular activities arranged specifically for them. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. The A-level has been introduced, and students are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

	Year 12	Year 13
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Skilful teaching meets the needs of individual students well.
- Students achieve well.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory, so students have gaps in their work.

Commentary

Examination results

182. Results in intermediate GNVQ and A-level in 2003 were average.

Standards and achievement

183. In Year 12, all GNVQ and AVCE students demonstrate a secure understanding of key business terms and concepts. They can all interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources. Intermediate GNVQ students can explain the factors which influence the choice of a business's location. They can confidently and accurately use a wide range of business terminology, which they demonstrated when creating break-even charts. They have a secure understanding of those factors that contribute towards good customer service, and they prepared appropriate presentations in a clear and confident manner. Although there are no students displaying work of distinction standard this still represents good achievement for students who would not traditionally be allowed access to sixth form studies in other schools. Students on the AVCE course can describe management styles and cultures present within business and identify communication channels. They can make judgements about how successfully a business is meeting its objectives and suggest alternative approaches that might enable the business to better meet its objectives. Year 13 A-level students have a secure understanding of key economic indicators such as unemployment, inflation, exchange rates, interest rates and government debt.

Teaching and learning

184. The range of teaching activities employed shows that there is an awareness of the necessity to meet the differing individual needs of all the business studies students in the sixth form. Teachers encourage independent learning. This was displayed when Year 12 students prepared a presentation on good and bad customer service and Year 13 prepared one on the effect of external influences on marketing strategies during the week of the inspection. Teachers led these lessons well, supporting and encouraging students but allowing them to take control of their own learning. Students' attitudes towards the subject are positive and students generally enjoy their lessons, although their attendance at lessons is less than satisfactory.

Leadership and management

185. Whilst there is a focus on improving standards there is not enough analysis of departmental practices, and strategies for raising attainment have not been formalised. Business education was not a focus subject at the time of the previous inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No courses were inspected in detail, but health and social care was sampled. Students on this course are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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