

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE ALSOP HIGH SCHOOL & TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE**

Walton, Liverpool

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104693

Headteacher: Mr P Jamieson

Lead inspector: Mrs Gillian Salter-Smith

Dates of inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004

Inspection number: 259252

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1750
School address:	Queen's Drive Liverpool Merseyside
Postcode:	L4 6SH
Telephone number:	0151 5252600
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Councillor M Fielding
Date of previous inspection:	April 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Alsop High School is very large comprehensive school with a sixth form in an inner city area. It is a designated Technology College. Student numbers have recently increased significantly following the closure of a nearby secondary school. The school currently operates from two sites. There is a partnership arrangement with a sixth form at another local school but currently just one student from The Alsop High School is involved. Planning is in progress for a collaboration of sixth form provision across five schools.

Most pupils are from white United Kingdom backgrounds with around two per cent from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a very small number of asylum seekers who do not speak English as their first language. There are no pupils in the early stages of learning English. The school draws many of its pupils from areas of high social and economic deprivation and the proportion of pupils eligible to receive free school meals is high. A small number of pupils are in the care of the local authority. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well above average and there is resourced provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). The majority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties, but other pupils' special needs include social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical and hearing impairment and autism.

Based on national tests taken at age 11, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average. The current Year 11 started school with particularly low scores in reading tests.

The school receives Excellence in Cities funding for learning mentors, provision for gifted and talented pupils and the special behavioural unit. The school has received awards for Investors in People, School Achievement, Healthy Schools and Sports Mark. It is part of the Department for Education and Skills two-year Key Stage 3 National Pilot scheme for curriculum development and Creative Partnerships.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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	Mrs M Sewell	Team inspector	English Drama
31100	Mr G Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics
12356	Mr R Dickason	Team inspector	Science
27803	Mr J Clark	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
31981	Mr E Forster	Team inspector	Art and design
21806	Mrs P Swinnerton	Team inspector	Design and technology Health and social care
15551	Mrs P Mitchell	Team inspector	Special educational needs
24127	Mr J Kidd	Team inspector	History Citizenship Personal, social and health education
20192	Mr T McDermott	Team inspector	Physical education
10275	Dr J Cosgrove	Team inspector	Religious education
33019	Mr S Aspinall	Team inspector	Geography Travel and Tourism - Post 16
12475	Mr S Johnson	Team inspector	Music
24887	Mrs Y Salmons	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language
15465	Mr T Parish	Team inspector	Product design – graphics - Post 16 ICT – Post 16
19214	Mr G Price	Team inspector	English – Post 16

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The Alsop High is a good school with a number of outstanding features.** Very good leadership and effective management have successfully brought the school through a period of rapid expansion brought about by the closure of a nearby school. Pupils are very well looked after and are happy and secure in school. Pupils achieve well in their academic work in response to high expectations and good teaching, though standards are below the national average. The governing body is highly committed to the school's development and is effective in providing good quality relevant educational opportunities for all pupils. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall results at GCSE and in National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 9 are well above average when compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment.
- Very good leadership and effective management at all levels mean that staff and all pupils, whatever their background or capability, are valued, a strong sense of community pervades and standards are rising.
- Good teaching and effective support from teaching assistants create an excitement about learning and expectations of pupils and students are high. Consequently pupils achieve well.
- The very good level of care provided by the school helps to create a very positive ethos where standards of behaviour are very good, there is little bullying and very few exclusions.
- Weaknesses in pupils' writing, reading, speaking and listening skills and sixth form students' communication and study skills restrict their attainment.
- Standards in English in Year 11, in mathematics overall and in religious education in Years 10 to 13 are well below the national average.
- Attendance, though improving, is unsatisfactory.
- Pupils achieve very well in Spanish, art and design and personal, social and health education.
- Systems to check on the quality of the work across subjects are not consistently rigorous.

Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Results at GCSE have improved significantly. National test results for pupils in Year 9 are improving. There are more very good and excellent lessons. The curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 19 has broadened and is innovative. The use of ICT has improved greatly. The number of students in the sixth form has increased significantly. Most issues identified for improvement have been improved.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

**Pupils' achievement is good overall.** Standards are below the national average. Taking into account pupils' starting points, they achieve well in Years 7 to 11. In national tests taken by Year 9 pupils in 2003, results in mathematics and science were well below the national average. In English they were below the national average. Compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment, overall results were well above average. Achievement is good in science overall and in English in Years 7 to 9. It is satisfactory in mathematics overall and in English in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' achievement is at least good in other subjects except in religious education in Years 10 and 11, where achievement is poor. Pupils' literacy skills are very weak when they come to the school and, although they improve, they remain below average. Pupils' competence in basic skills in numeracy

and ICT enables them to make progress across subjects. Boys did not achieve as well as girls in the most recent GCSE examinations but the difference is less evident in current work. Pupils behave very well, have positive attitudes towards learning and make good progress in their personal development. Relationships between pupils are very good. A significant minority of pupils has a poor record of attendance and punctuality despite the considerable efforts of the school. Pupils with special educational needs, those whose first language is not English and those identified as gifted and talented make good progress.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a good quality of education; teaching and learning are good.** Teaching is very good in art and design, Spanish and personal, social and health education. It is good in most other subjects, except in mathematics overall and English in Years 10 and 11 where it is satisfactory. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of learning and good behaviour. In most lessons, a good variety of activities taught at a good pace by knowledgeable teachers ensures that pupils are involved, interested and learning well. Good attention is paid to improving pupils' literacy skills. Pupils are not always confident when working independently. Whole-school assessment is well developed but information is not used consistently well across subjects.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is well planned to meet pupils' needs and includes a broad range of academic, vocational and work-related courses, however, the locally agreed syllabus for religious education is not taught to all pupils in Years 10 to 13. Personal, social and health education and provision for pupils' moral and social development are very good. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Teaching assistants and learning mentors contribute significantly to pupils' wellbeing and good achievement. Support for pupils' learning out of school time, particularly through Cyberlink, is excellent. Though used well to support learning, the library is small and under-stocked. Advice and guidance for pupils' academic and personal development are very good. Most parents are supportive but a significant minority does not ensure that their children attend school regularly. Involvement in and with the community is an impressive feature that contributes to pupils' personal development. Links with primary schools, other colleges and institutions are very well developed.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good overall.** Very good leadership is determined in its efforts to raise standards and promote a supportive ethos. The school's priorities in development plans reflect this. Strong teams of staff provide outstanding role models. The school has benefited enormously from its status as a Technology College. The governing body provides strong support and guides the school's development. It is very well informed and holds managers to account. However, the governing body is not fulfilling some of its statutory duties. The school knows where its strengths and weaknesses lie but not all faculties have well developed and rigorous self-evaluation.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents and pupils have a high regard for the school and have great confidence in it.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- increase attendance;
- raise standards in English at GCSE, in mathematics overall, in religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form overall;
- continue to develop pupils' basic skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening;
- bring consistency to self-evaluation and assessment across all areas of the school;
- develop more fully students' communication and study skills in the sixth form;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- teach the locally agreed syllabus for religious education in Years 10 to 13 to all pupils and students;
- provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students;
- include all the required information in the combined prospectus and governors' annual report.



## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE ALSOP HIGH SCHOOL & TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

A larger than average and very rapidly expanding sixth form which offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses for students of all abilities.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a good and effective sixth form. It is cost-effective and provides good value for money.** It gives a good quality of education to its students, within a well balanced budget and at below average costs. The very good leadership of key staff has ensured that the sixth form continues to move forward in difficult circumstances, whilst building very good quality links with the wider local community to secure and sustain progress. The integration of students from a nearby closing school has been carried through successfully, and the sixth form continues to raise the aspirations and achievements of all of its students. Taking into account students' standards when they start their sixth form courses, they make steady progress and, in reaching below national average standards overall, their achievement is good. Well over nine-tenths of students who start in the sixth form remain on roll over the course of a year and retention is good. Two-thirds of students completing two-year courses go on to higher education. The remaining one-third go into further education or employment.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall good teaching ensures good learning and achievement.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Students receive a very good quality of overall support.
- The inclusive nature of the sixth form strives continuously to meet the needs of all its students.
- The most recent examination results were well below the national average.
- The statutory requirement for the teaching of religious education is not fully met.

### 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	<b>Provision in English literature is satisfactory.</b> Standards are below average. Good teaching and the students' hard work, ensure that achievement is satisfactory.
	<b>Provision in French is satisfactory.</b> Standards are average overall and students' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory.
Mathematics	<b>Provision in mathematics is good.</b> Students achieve well because of good teaching by enthusiastic, well-qualified teachers. They enjoy the challenge of mathematics and appreciate the efforts of staff. Numbers and results are set to improve.
Science	<b>Provision in biology is satisfactory.</b> The standard of work seen in lessons was well below average. Teaching overall is satisfactory. As a result learning is satisfactory as is achievement when lessons are suitably demanding.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	<b>Provision in ICT is good.</b> Standards are below average. Good teaching leads to good learning. Achievement is satisfactory overall because many students with low prior attainment are placed inappropriately on the course.
Humanities	<b>Provision in history is satisfactory.</b> Teaching is good and students achieve well. Numbers opting for the subject are increasing rapidly. Standards are below average because many students do not have the highest GCSE grades.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<p><b>Provision in product design-textiles is good.</b> Standards are average. Teaching and learning are good leading to good achievement by well-motivated and creative students.</p> <p><b>Provision in product design-graphics is satisfactory.</b> Standards are below average, but well motivated students achieve satisfactorily. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p><b>Provision in art and design is very good.</b> Standards of current work are well above average, and students achieve very well. Very good teaching leads to very good learning in lessons.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<p><b>Provision in physical education is very good.</b> Overall standards at advanced level are above average, and this shows very good achievement. Very good teaching leads to very good learning. Students' attitudes are very good.</p> <p><b>Provision in travel and tourism is very good.</b> Very good teaching results in enthusiastic learning and high achievement.</p>
Business	No subject in this curriculum area was inspected in depth.
Health and social care	No subject in this curriculum area was inspected in depth.

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*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**

This aspect is very good. Before students enter the sixth form, they are made well aware of the demands that sixth form study will place on them, and they are equally clear of the benefits of extended education. Whilst on their courses of study, students' academic progress and personal development are systematically but sensitively monitored. Individual teachers, departments, and the sixth form management team are always available in both regular and informal tutorial and guidance sessions. Preparations for leaving the sixth form are comprehensive, and students are able, in many ways, to sample directly the new dimensions of higher education, further education and employment. As the sixth form expands, there is some mismatch between courses available, and students' needs and aspirations. The school is aware of this and is continually broadening the range of courses offered from the age of 14 through to 19 to ensure that there are suitable courses to match students' interests and needs.

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

**The overall leadership of the sixth form is very good.** There is a clear vision of aspiration and continuous improvement, and development planning is very clear. The governing body is knowledgeable and effective, and has been instrumental in ensuring that the current state of rapid change and expansion is handled sensitively and positively. Curriculum leadership is good. Overall management of the sixth form is good.

**STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Students are very positive about the sixth form. They expressed these views, both in the questionnaire and in many face-to-face interviews. They value the quality of teaching they receive, the commitment of the teachers, and the guidance, care and support the sixth form tutor team provides. Almost all students choose to ignore the old, cramped, and unsuitable conditions of the sixth form block, and express, with enthusiasm, their appreciation of the educational experiences they are having. They are very loyal to their sixth form.

**PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

## STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AND STUDENTS

### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

When pupils' and students' prior attainment is taken into account, their achievement across the school is good. Though current standards of work are below the national average, this represents **good achievement** across the school.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, the 2003 results in national tests taken in English, mathematics and science in Year 9 and in GCSE were well above the average for schools with pupils of similar prior attainment.
- Pupils arrive at the school with very weak literacy skills which, though they improve whilst they are in the school, hinder their attainment.
- Pupils' achievement is good in most subjects in Years 7 to 11 and very good in art and design, Spanish and personal, social and health education.
- Standards in mathematics are well below the national average in Years 7 to 11, though pupils' achievement is satisfactory.
- Standards in English in the current Year 11 are well below the national average, though achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are rising in other year groups.
- Achievement is very good in art and design, physical education and travel and tourism in the sixth form.
- Standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are below the national average overall but students' achievement is good.
- Pupils do not achieve well enough in religious education in Years 10 to 13 because they are not taught the locally agreed syllabus.

### Commentary

1. Based on results in national tests in English, mathematics and science taken at age 11 and on nationally recognised tests for reading ability, pupils' standards when they start school in Year 7 are well below the national average overall. Pupils have particularly weak literacy skills. When the current Year 11 started school in Year 7, around 70 per cent had reading ages of two and half years or more below their chronological age reflecting very low prior attainment. In other year groups, around half of the pupils start in Year 7 with similarly low reading ages. Since the integration of pupils, many with low levels of attainment, from a nearby school which closed eighteen months ago, the level of attainment on entry has dropped.
2. From this low baseline, most pupils make good progress in response to good quality teaching and very good pastoral support. By Year 9, pupils have improved on well below NATIONAL average standards and they reach below average standards in most subjects and their achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils do especially well in art and design, Spanish and personal, social and health education. In art and design and Spanish, the teaching is especially well structured and stimulating, such that pupils are highly motivated and are very well supported in their learning. In mathematics, although pupils make some progress, the standards remain well below the national average by Year 9 representing satisfactory achievement. Across subjects, well structured teaching pays good attention to improving pupils' weak literacy skills. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils help many pupils to gain confidence and, in many cases, overcome low self-esteem. Those pupils who do not attend school regularly do not make as good progress. Overall, there is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls, except in Spanish where boys are doing better than girls.
3. Overall results in the 2003 national tests taken in English, mathematics and science by pupils at age 14, were well below the national average but well above the average for schools with

pupils of similar prior attainment. English results were better than mathematics and science and were below the national average rather than well below. Although the school did not quite meet its targets in 2003, the trend of improvement over the past four years is better than the national trend. Girls did better than boys in English tests; boys did better than girls in mathematics tests, but in science tests, and overall, there was no significant difference.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.9 (29.2)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	31.0 (31.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	30.0 (31.1)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 334 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

4. GCSE results have improved significantly since the previous inspection, doubling the proportion gaining five or more higher grades A\* to C. The overall trend of improvement over the past four years is better than the national trend. The school exceeded its targets for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at A\* to C and for overall average points scored. These improving results have been achieved alongside considerable disruption caused by the school integrating high numbers of pupils, many of low prior attainment, due to the closure of a nearby school eighteen months ago.
5. In 2003, based on the average points scored in pupils' best eight subjects, results at GCSE were well below the national average but well above average when compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at A\* to C was below the national average but well above the average for schools with pupils of similar prior attainment. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more graded passes (A\* to G grades), including a pass in English and mathematics, was in line with the national average and well above average compared with similar schools. The proportion of pupils leaving with no qualification was more than in most schools, but better than many schools with similar pupils. This is because pupils are placed on alternative courses where they gain other accreditation more suited to their needs.
6. Results in English language, English literature and mathematics were well the national average. When the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades at A\* to C is compared with similar schools, results in mathematics were well above average, and in English language were well below average.
7. Based on average points scored, results were well above the national average in art and design and double award science, and results in French and statistics were above average. Results were close to the national average in single award science, music, Spanish and physical education. Results in most other subjects, where numbers were high enough to make sensible comparisons, were below or well below average. Girls did better than boys in most subjects, except in Spanish where boys outperformed girls. These 2003 GCSE results reflect overall good achievement for pupils of differing levels of prior attainment in most subjects. In English and mathematics, the results reflect satisfactory achievement; higher and middle attaining pupils achieved well but lower attaining pupils achieved less well than they might be expected to, sometimes due to absence from lessons or the barrier presented by weak literacy skills.
8. Current standards of work in Year 11 are below the national average, but in most subjects reflect pupils' good achievement compared to their well below average standards at the end of Year 9. Pupils' achievement in art and design, Spanish (especially for boys), and personal, social and health education continues to be very good. There is no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys, except in Spanish where boys are doing better than girls in Years 10 and 11. Overall, pupils do well when they attend school regularly and are

motivated by well planned teaching that challenges pupils and takes account of their differing needs, especially in developing weaknesses in literacy skills. The good humour with which most lessons are conducted encourages very good relationships and so pupils feel well supported and they enjoy learning and do well. The school has a number of innovative approaches to examination courses and the planned curriculum, particularly in science. The arrangements enable some pupils to take examination courses from Year 9. This gives pupils a better opportunity to gain one or more qualification in science by the time they reach age 16. This flexibility, alongside the broadening of the curriculum to offer more vocational routes from age 14, is helping pupils to succeed.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	42 (34)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	87 (89)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	28.8 (29.6)	34.7 (34.7)

*There were 322 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

9. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well throughout the school. Competent, well-trained teaching assistants work effectively with the pupils, both in lessons and in withdrawal sessions where pupils work individually on their own educational programmes. Accurate assessment of their needs ensures that pupils' work is at the right level of difficulty for them. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are well supported and helped to control their behaviour and to work in the lessons. Pupils in the 'enhanced provision' for pupils with specific learning difficulties or other complex needs achieve very well because of the excellent specialist teaching they receive.
10. Gifted and talented pupils achieve well because the funding received from the Excellence in Cities initiative is well used to provide a rich and varied curriculum. All identified pupils in Year 11 achieved five A\* to C grades in GCSEs, many gaining A and B grades.
11. The small number of pupils whose home language is not English, but are not in the early stages of learning English, achieve well. The attainment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is tracked but numbers are too small to make sensible comparisons.
12. Throughout the school pupils' weak literacy skills hold back their attainment. In most subjects, teachers pay good attention to developing these skills and they do improve. Pupils have sufficient basic competence in mathematics and ICT to enable them to use these skills to carry out numerical and ICT tasks as part of their learning across the subjects.

**Sixth Form**

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	76.8 (81.0)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	1.8 (4.3)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	133.6 (149.3)	253.1 (254.5)

*There were 33 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

13. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is well below average and has been over recent years. Standards in A-level and AS-level examinations though rising slowly between 2000 and 2002, dipped in 2003 and remained well below the national average. However, until recently,

numbers, both overall and in individual subject areas, have been small. In 2003, 28 students in total took A-level examinations. Female students generally gained better grades than male students. In 2002 the opposite was the case. Retention rates on courses are good. Students persevere with their chosen courses with good support from teaching staff. The number of students to be entered for A-level examinations this year, 2004, will broadly double and it is set to increase further over the next few years.

14. This rapid and exceptional growth has arisen partly because of the assimilation of a nearby closing school, partly from an expansion of the academic and vocational provision the sixth form is offering, and partly because of the esteem with which the school is held within the local community. A key feature of the sixth form is its drive to raise levels of aspiration, and to encourage students of all abilities to work hard to realise their different levels of potential. The senior leadership of the school, and the governing body have encouraged this, realising all the time the risks this entails to the apparent standards of achievement within the sixth form. They have maintained a firm monitoring and evaluation schedule to ensure that standards are not depressed. The school holds detailed and robust information tracking the progress the students in the sixth form are making, not only in their academic studies, but also in their personal development. It is very successful in providing a wide curriculum which not only challenges the most able but also supports lower attaining students in their determination to succeed. It successfully encourages the all-round development of the young people of this area of the city, allowing them to progress to higher education in numbers not seen before. This clearly supports the initiatives driven by government to raise levels of attainment and aspiration in those areas which traditionally do not have a history of engagement with higher education. The students are very committed to their studies, and to improving their own standards
15. Achievement, overall, is good. From well below average standards on entry, standards in most courses improve to below the national average. Achievement is very good in advanced courses in art and design, physical education and travel and tourism. Achievement is good in mathematics, history and textiles, and satisfactory in English literature, biology, French, product design, and ICT. Where achievement is good or better, students are able to meet the demands of the course. A small number of students are inappropriately placed on courses which are overly demanding; these students do not achieve satisfactorily. The unsatisfactory attendance of a significant minority of students affects their progress because they do not benefit as much as they could from the very good guidance and support provided. The small number of students whose first language is not English achieve well.
16. This is the first year that students with special educational needs have stayed on into the sixth form and there are, as yet, too few courses at an appropriate level for them. However, the few students who do stay on are well provided for, achieve well and are expected to gain worthwhile qualifications. They are well integrated into classes and are able to work maturely. During some lessons they receive help from teaching assistants. The teaching assistants have copies of the lesson notes before the lessons and so are very well prepared to help the students during the lesson. Staff in the special needs department are also available if needed for pupils on a 'drop in' basis. These students receive good teaching that ensures they understand what they are doing and what they need to do to succeed. The use of ICT helps them to improve the quality of their written work. Because they enjoy what they are doing, they try hard and take a pride in the quality of their work. One student said that although the work was hard she was really enjoying it.

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

Pupils' and students' attitudes towards school and learning are **good**. Pupils' and students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good overall. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. Behaviour is very good. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of behaviour are very good.
- Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are very good.
- Pupils' and students' attitudes towards learning are good and pupils express very positive views about the school.
- Pupils make good progress with their personal development.
- The school pays very good attention to pupils' social awareness, responsibility and moral concern.
- Attendance remains unsatisfactory despite the school's best efforts.
- The provision for pupils to experience moments of reflection in tutor periods is patchy and does not provide an alternative form of a daily act of collective worship.
- There is no overall policy for the good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural provision and no consistent means of checking on its quality and evaluating its effectiveness.

### Commentary

17. The majority of pupils want to come to school, they value their education and participate very well in the various activities available. A significant minority of pupils has a poor record of attendance, partly because they have a less than positive attitude towards education and partly because of a range of social problems. In many cases, pupils receive insufficient encouragement from their parents to attend and to be on time for school. Attendance overall was well below the average for secondary schools last year and this had been exacerbated by the absorption of pupils, from a nearby school, whose attendance records were very low. The school monitors attendance very closely and, by concerted efforts, has improved attendance this year, although both it and punctuality are still unsatisfactory.

#### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year was 88.4 %**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.7	School data	1.9
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.*

18. Standards of behaviour are very good and pupils' conduct is orderly. The number of exclusions is very low. Pupils get on very well together and instances of anti-social or inconsiderate behaviour are comparatively few.

**Ethnic background of pupils****Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1708	13	4
White – Irish	18	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	10	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	2	0	0

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

19. All pupils make good progress in becoming mature, responsible and confident and reach a satisfactory level of independence although many pupils require and receive support because of low self-esteem and confidence.
20. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory and has improved since the previous inspection. The school does not comply with the statutory requirements to provide collective worship each day for all its pupils, partly because of physical difficulties, and it does not provide consistent alternative opportunities for reflection in tutor periods. The assemblies often make a valuable contribution and include an act of worship. The pupils are polite, interested and attentive, but not always involved. The provision in tutor registration periods is patchy. Religious education plays its expected role in the provision of opportunities for reflection and spiritual insights, but only operates as a discrete subject up to Year 9 and so does not meet statutory requirements. Other opportunities occur in the curriculum to reflect upon the natural world, as in history, geography, and science. Pupils are able to express feelings and pride in achieving personal goals in art and design and music, drama and sport and other subjects.
21. The school has a clear code of conduct. Pupils behave very well in and outside of lessons and the school has effective ways of dealing with any problems that might arise. Opportunities occur in religious education, personal social and health education and GCSE humanities to raise moral issues and choices on matters such as abortion and divorce, sex and drugs, war and peace, and world poverty. Opportunities occur in several subjects, including history, geography and science, to discuss moral decisions on such topics as the Holocaust, environmental pollution and cloning.
22. For such a large school on two sites with some difficulties to overcome, it is a very smooth-running, harmonious unit with very good relationships. Students learn about society in subjects such as history and personal, social and health education. There are opportunities to shoulder responsibility in such activities as the school council, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and helping younger pupils to settle in. Personal, social and health education courses and the humanities make good contributions to citizenship and social development. Visits, including a number of residential visits for some students, help the process of socialisation in a school that plays an important part in the local community, particularly in terms of youth activities. Opportunities to further pupils' socialisation range from foreign trips, musical and dramatic performances and sport, to extra-curricular activities of all kinds. Moral concern is shown in social and charitable activities such as support for Children in Need and the local Hospice.



23. The provision for the cultural development of pupils is good. Subjects such as drama, music and art and design play a good, and often a very good, part in cultural development. The school and its immediate locality do not furnish many examples of first hand multicultural experience but opportunities exist in the curriculum to study other cultures, religions and races, and the school does promote appropriate attitudes to racism. In Years 7 to 9 religious education introduces the pupils to Christianity and other major religious and cultural traditions. In history, the cultural heritage of this and other countries are studied. In English, art and design, music and geography some of the themes studied have a multicultural content. Almost all lessons in art and design contain references to artists and cultures and contain discussions that touch upon present cultural and multicultural aspects. There are valuable extra-curricular visits to galleries and museums. Modern foreign language teaching uses the studied language to discuss cultural aspects of other countries.

### **Sixth Form**

24. Students are very pleased with their experiences in the sixth form. They have a high regard for their tutors and are right to consider that they receive very good academic and personal advice, guidance and support. Their conduct is good and they are conscientious although some rely much on their tutors to maintain momentum with their studies. Their participation in enrichment activities is good. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated very well into the classes and are fully included in all lessons and activities. They enjoy learning, work hard and behave very well. Attendance is unsatisfactory because a minority of students do not attend regularly and so do not benefit as much as they could from the good teaching and very good support and guidance.
25. The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students in the sixth form is good overall. Although the provision for collective acts of worship and for discrete religious education does not meet statutory requirements, what is provided makes a positive contribution to the moral and social development of the students. There are good examples in English and Theatre Studies of opportunities to reflect on spiritual and moral issues in the texts studied. Geography offers opportunities to discuss moral issues concerned with energy conservation and patterns of inheritance. In modern foreign languages, students gain an insight into multi-cultural issues such as immigration. In travel and tourism, good use is made of videos and discussions to record and discuss significant events such as those surrounding the Twin Towers in New York or the death of John Lennon. In physical education, sport and after-school clubs, students have opportunities to develop teamwork and fulfilment based on success. Students have opportunities to shoulder responsibilities inside and outside of school and make a contribution to the development of younger pupils.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The school provides a **good** quality of education. Teaching and learning are good. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, it is innovative and well planned to match pupils' individual needs, but the statutory requirement to teach religious education to all pupils and students in Years 10 to 13 is not fully met. The level and quality of staffing is good. There are a good number of computers but not enough books in the library. Accommodation overall is unsatisfactory, but an extensive building programme is well under way. The advice and guidance for pupils' academic and personal development are very good. Involvement in and with the community is an impressive feature and links with primary schools, other colleges and institutions are very well developed.

## Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **good**. The quality of assessment of pupils' work and the use made of assessment information is satisfactory overall.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good in art and design, personal social and health education and Spanish. It is good in most other subjects.
- Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of learning and good behaviour.
- In most lessons, a good variety of activities, taught at a good pace by knowledgeable teachers, ensures that pupils are involved, interested and learning well.
- Good attention is paid to improving pupils' literacy skills.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very effectively together to support pupils' learning.
- Pupils are not always confident when working independently.

### Commentary

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 203 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (3%)	43 (21%)	98 (49%)	53 (26%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

26. The good quality of teaching provided in most subjects in Years 7 to 11 ensures that pupils are learning well in lessons and that they achieve good standards in relation to their starting points. Since the previous inspection the quality of teaching has improved in that there are more very good and excellent lessons and fewer unsatisfactory lessons. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in English (special educational needs), science, history, geography and Spanish.
27. Teachers set a very positive tone in lessons, using a great deal of praise and encouragement where it is well deserved. They establish very good relationships with pupils and set high expectations of their behaviour and achievement. Pupils respond very well to the good humour with which they are taught and they appreciate the help, support and encouragement that teachers and other adults in the school offer them. All this serves to increase pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Teachers include many opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and groups, often independently of the teacher, and teaching assistants play an important role in supporting this work. Work in ICT in Years 10 and 11 is particularly successful in developing pupils' independent learning skills. Though increasing through participation in these types of activities, pupils still lack confidence in working on their own.
28. In most subjects, pupils enjoy the lessons and find learning interesting because lessons are well planned to match pupils' different learning needs and they include a good variety of activities. Teachers' well-informed planning enables pupils to move through series of well-staged and well-structured tasks so that they learn and make progress in small manageable steps. Teaching and learning in Spanish is especially effective in this way and has helped boys in particular to do well. Good subject knowledge ensures that teachers give clear and easy to understand explanations and demonstrations, as was seen in many design and technology lessons. All teachers are aware of gifted and talented pupils; they are identified in the planning of lessons, resulting in more challenging work being provided to help them learn at a good rate.
29. The school's work across subjects on the National Strategy to develop teaching and learning has helped to bring a common structure to lessons. Most lessons have a clear beginning

where it is made clear to pupils what they will learn and what they will be doing and activities are designed to capture pupils' attention quickly. The middle part of lessons is used to develop knowledge and understanding further and apply it using a variety of tasks. Finally, time is spent recapping and consolidating what has been learnt and setting the goals for future work. Pupils benefit from knowing exactly what is expected of them and gaining from the teachers' frequent feedback to them on how well they are doing in relation to the original goals for the lesson.

30. Teachers are very aware of the need to improve pupils' basic literacy skills and in most subjects teachers pay good attention to the use of key words and offer a variety of means to support pupils when they are writing in different ways. For example, in geography pupils keep an on-going dictionary of specialist geographical words and end of lessons games are devised to revise these terms. The use of ICT to enhance learning is well established in most subjects and helps to bring interest and, sometimes, excitement to learning as was the case in an excellent Year 9 geography lesson where pupils were able to see how earthquake activity is measured as it is happening across the world. Teachers are aware of the need to develop pupils' basic mathematical skills and attention is paid to developing these skills in science, design and technology, physical education and geography in particular.
31. Most subjects give homework regularly and it is marked. It is usually relevant to classwork and encourages pupils to find things out for themselves. Though satisfactory overall, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking. Some pupils' work in English is not marked often enough and in some subjects, assessments do not relate very closely to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades so that it is difficult for pupils to know how well they are doing. Not all subjects, including ICT, Spanish and music, give clear and precise information on what to do to improve.
32. Where teaching and learning are satisfactory, such as in a number of mathematics lessons, activities lack variety and imagination; learning and teaching is carried out in a constructive manner but there is little excitement. Satisfactory teaching in other subjects occurs from time to time, for example in science, when opportunities to use practical work to make difficult ideas clearer are not used.
33. The two unsatisfactory lessons seen in Years 7 to 11, one in each of mathematics and physical education, were due to lack of planning to take account of pupils' learning needs and interests and lack of pace and structure to learning such that pupils lose interest and concentration.
34. Teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. All teachers are aware of these pupils and their individual needs, identifying them in their planning and ensuring that they are able to do the work. Pupils receive good quality support from teaching assistants who are well trained and very capable. They enable pupils to do the work but also encourage them to be as independent as possible. Because they liaise closely with subject teachers they are well prepared for the lessons, feel confident to work with other pupils in the classroom and so also provide valuable help for less able pupils, or any others who need it. The pupils say they like the support in the classroom, it helps them to do their work properly and makes them feel more confident. The very good relationships between the adults and pupils motivate them to work and helps them to feel secure.
35. Pupils in the 'enhanced provision' receive excellent individual specialist teaching to meet their particular needs and also receive support in class so they can complete work in lessons accurately. Good use is made of up-to-date resources, particularly computer programs, to help pupils to learn.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

**The excellent lesson was an individual session given to a pupil with a Statement for specific learning difficulties in the 'enhanced' provision.**

The lesson was planned in detail based on the targets in the pupils' individual programme and there were clear

objectives for the session. A range and variety of tasks were planned to keep the pupil's interest and concentration high and some were timed to challenge the pupil and enable him to see improvements from session to session. The excellent relationship between the teacher and pupil, aided by humour, encouraged the pupil to learn and enjoy the activities. Throughout the session the pupil is taught strategies to help him to succeed and become more independent in learning. The pupil's work was constantly assessed, corrected and explained helping to make literacy skills easier for him. For example, the pupil was forming some letters in a slow laborious way and was taught how to write them more efficiently. The pupil said that he enjoys the sessions although the work is sometimes hard. He is particularly proud of the progress he has made in writing and spelling and feels more confident in other classes.

## **Assessment**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Whole-school assessment is well developed but information is not used consistently well across subjects.
- The system for identifying underachieving pupils by mentors is very good.
- Assessment methods for pupils with special educational needs are very good.
- Marking in some subjects is inconsistent.

## **Commentary**

36. A well developed school assessment system provides subject leaders with information about pupils' past performance and their predicted and target grades. Gifted and talented and pupils with special educational needs are identified on lists available to all staff through the school computer network. Marks for each subject are added to create a system that identifies underachieving pupils and leads to the provision of very good support through form tutors and the mentoring system. Each subject area regularly produces list of pupils who are underachieving and in Years 10 and 11. Mentors use this information to assist pupils to meet their targets. A focus group for assessment meets regularly and monitors the use of the system.
37. The system is used well to support learning and help identify underachievement within most subjects. In science, modern foreign languages and physical education it is used very well; marking is regular and provides information about National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. In English this is not done, some work is not marked at all and pupils do not know their target grades. In English, in Years 7 to 9, there is no consistency amongst teachers in their use of assessment. In some other subjects, including mathematics, marking is done inconsistently but in others it is done regularly. In design and technology it is used well to provide pupils with information about how they can improve although predicted grades in design and technology are sometimes too high. In science and modern foreign languages targets are used well and teachers monitor progress.
38. Pupils' special educational needs are assessed in detail and individual programmes are written with specific targets to meet. Twice a year their progress towards these targets is assessed and this information is very well used to set new, appropriate targets. The progress pupils make is carefully recorded and tracked so action can be taken if any pupil is not progressing as well as they should be.

## **Sixth Form**

39. Good teaching results in good quality of learning in most subjects and leads to overall good achievement in relation to students' well below national average starting points. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in Spanish and physical education. One unsatisfactory lesson was seen. Many students enter the sixth form with lower attainment levels than is usually expected and most of them, when they attend regularly, reach the standards expected of them. They manage this because teachers work very hard to give students a great deal of individual

support and to make complex issues accessible. In many subjects teachers give good support to developing students' basic skills in literacy, mathematics and ICT but there is a need to continue to support students in developing literacy skills in particular and learning how best to study, organise their work and carry out research.

40. Teachers are committed to students' success and in most subjects communicate an enthusiasm for their subject. They use their considerable knowledge well to give clear demonstrations and explanations and plan learning in small steps to ease students' understanding. Lessons are well prepared and include a good range of interesting and demanding tasks. There is often a good emphasis on using practical work to demonstrate complex issues, as was seen in biology.
41. Where teaching is satisfactory, lessons are less exciting and lack pace and students are passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants. One unsatisfactory lesson in biology presented undemanding tasks with little variety. Students were very passive and not involved in thinking deeply enough for themselves.
42. Good relationships between teachers and students and the positive and encouraging atmosphere created in lessons helps to build students' self-confidence and overcome students' reticence to participate in lessons. Teachers are skilled in involving students in demanding question and answer sessions. However, in design and technology, ICT and art and design, students are not given enough opportunities to talk to each other as well as the teacher about their work.
43. Homework is a regular feature well linked to study topic. It is marked well in most subjects and gives students an understanding of what to do to improve.

### **Assessment**

44. Spreadsheets are used to create very thorough records of students' achievements in GCSE examinations. For every student graphs from statistical bulletins are used with GCSE average point scores to predict grades that will be gained and to set targets for students. All of this information is provided to subject leaders and is available to all teachers through the computer network.
45. Records of marks are used to identify students who are underachieving and progress is reviewed every half term in meetings with teachers and with form tutors. This is a well-organised system that provides good support for students. However, inclusion of data from GNVQ ICT courses has resulted in unrealistically high predictions of grades that are not moderated by discussions with teachers. As a consequence, some low attaining students who are at risk of failure, for example in biology, have not been provided with the support they need.
46. In many subjects, work is marked regularly and is satisfactory, it is particularly well done in physical education. In history diagnostic marking is good and in French, assessment is linked well with examination criteria. Regular written feedback is provided in art and overall guidance for students is good.

## The curriculum

The curriculum has many very good features but the statutory requirement to teach all pupils religious education is not met in Years 10 to 13. **It is satisfactory overall.** Staffing is good, resources are satisfactory and accommodation is unsatisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The alternative curriculum programme and good range of academic courses provides very well for the needs of all pupils especially in Year 10 and 11 pupils.
- Courses are very well planned to ensure continuity and progression from Year 9 through to Year 13
- There is excellent support for pupils' learning outside school hours and very good extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in sport.
- The programme for personal, social and health education taught across all years is very good.
- The programme to support the development of pupils' literacy skills is good.
- Not all pupils in Years 10 to 13 receive their statutory entitlement to be taught religious education.
- Gifted and talented pupils and pupils with special educational needs are well provided for.

### Commentary

47. The school has worked hard to provide a curriculum that matches the needs of its pupils. What it provides is imaginative and innovative and deliberately planned to provide pupils with a clear route for learning from Year 9 through to Year 13. There is a well organised approach across the school to developing pupils' basic skills, especially in literacy. A strong personal, social and health education programme supports pupils' self-confidence and personal development very well. Flexible arrangements to start examination courses early are enhancing pupils' chances of gaining qualifications, for example in science and mathematics, and there are plans to extend similar arrangements to design and technology. In Years 10 and 11 the needs and aptitudes of different groups of pupils are particularly well met through a wide range of academic GCSE courses, vocational courses, joint courses with local colleges and work placements. These provide many opportunities to continue study from age 14 to 19. As a result, attendance in these two year groups is improving. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, provision for religious education in Years 10 to 13 is unsatisfactory and does not meet statutory requirements because not all pupils are taught the locally agreed syllabus.
48. All pupils benefit from the school's excellent Cyberlink provision which promotes learning outside school hours through regular homework and activity clubs, providing support for key skills in literacy, numeracy, and ICT as well as programmes to improve motivation and develop self-esteem. These opportunities are supplemented by a very good range of sporting opportunities for both boys and girls
49. Provision for pupils with special educational needs has been well thought out and organised to meet the individual needs of a large number of pupils. Pupils are identified in all lessons and individual programmes are used throughout the school and in all subjects. In some subjects, for example in science, pupils are grouped by ability and pupils with special educational needs are in smaller groups allowing more individual teaching. There is good quality support in many lessons and individual withdrawal sessions to work on individual targets. Resources are good quality, kept up-to-date and include the latest technology. Funding received for Technology College Status has been well used to provide 'Successmaker', a computer program used to help pupils with special educational needs to improve their basic skills in mathematics.
50. Gifted and talented pupils each have an individual programme, discussed with them twice a year, which sets targets for them to reach. This recognition of their achievements is helping to raise self-esteem and aspirations and has resulted in many more pupils staying on into the

sixth form. Provision for talented pupils in physical education and art and design is good. Visits to Paris broaden the horizons of pupils studying art and provide an opportunity for language students to experience 'the real thing'. After-school clubs and opportunities to practise conversation with native speakers also help to develop foreign language skills. An extensive range of visits and residential experiences within a city-wide network allow pupils to meet pupils from other schools which helps to motivate them and raise ambitions as well as helping them to achieve.

## Sixth Form

51. The numbers of students on roll are rising very rapidly, and more and more courses are coming on stream as the school endeavours to meet all these students' needs and aspirations. The overall curriculum builds effectively on the course provided in Years 10 and 11, though there is some misplacement of a few lower attaining students on to courses which do not yet directly meet their needs. Although the statutory requirement for the provision of religious education in the sixth form is not met, it is an improvement on the situation at the time of the previous inspection, and makes a positive contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students who receive it.
52. The school systematically evaluates the quality and relevance of what it offers to students in the context of efforts to raise the educational horizons of the community it successfully serves. At present, the school has a limited collaboration with a nearby school, but just one student from the other school is involved. From September, the school will be part of a collaboration of five schools, in a city-wide reorganisation of sixth form provision. With an even broader range of courses to offer, this collaboration will help to meet the needs of all aspiring students.
53. The school currently offers students a good range of AS-level courses, all of which can be carried through to A-level in Year 13, advanced vocational courses, GNVQ courses, and GCSE courses, including mathematics and English re-sits. Almost all students take general studies though students on work related courses miss this due to timetabling difficulties. This means that these students also miss the necessary religious education. The courses on offer will expand in the next school year to cater for even larger numbers of students.
54. All students follow a well-constructed programme of personal, social and health education, which includes some opportunities for reflection. A very strong Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the Community Sports Leader Award, regular tutorial sessions and seminars, and well-supported representative team games are four formal aspects of a good enrichment programme for all students. However insufficient time is given to building communication and study skills, and some students, though competent to follow teacher led learning, are limited in their ability to discuss and research on a more sophisticated individual level. Students have the opportunity to obtain the ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence-an ICT qualification). This reflects the fact that the school has Technology College Status.
55. All students have equal access to the sixth form and its curriculum, and the large majority has a good balance of taught lessons and individual study time. However, facilities for private study are very limited during the school day. Some students overcome this barrier by remaining on the site beyond the normal day, often in the company of their teachers, to consolidate their learning.
56. This is the first year that students with special educational needs have stayed on into the sixth form and there are, as yet, too few courses at an appropriate level for them. However the few students who do stay on are well provided for, achieve well and are expected to gain worthwhile qualifications. They are well integrated into classes and are able to work maturely. During some lessons they receive help from teaching assistants. The teaching assistants have copies of the lesson notes before the lessons and so are very well prepared to help the students during the lesson. The staff in the special needs department are also available if needed for students on a 'drop in' basis. They receive good teaching that ensures they

understand what they are doing and what they need to do to succeed. The use of ICT helps them to improve the quality of their written work. Because they enjoy what they are doing they try hard and take a pride in the quality of their work. One student said that, although the work was hard she was really enjoying it.

57. Provision for students in the sixth form who are identified as gifted and talented is good and they achieve well. In lessons they are identified, they are given challenging work to do and the style of teaching allows them to thrive. In some subjects, such as art, there is a wide range of activities after school that help the students to broaden their horizons. Recognition of their achievements is helping to raise self-esteem. Visits to universities and other higher education institutions and participation in open days and summer schools have been successful in raising aspirations and have resulted in more students applying to go on to higher education. A graduate mentor who can provide advice and guidance on going to university has helped students to feel more confident and increased ambition. For the first time this year a student has applied to Oxford University and another has applied to attend medical School.
58. Provision for students whose first language is not English is good. Currently there are three of the students in the sixth form and all three speak English fluently. All of these students achieve well. They have very good attitudes to learning and are well integrated into the sixth form. Library resources are insufficient to allow them to study independently in their first language.

### **Staffing Accommodation and Resources**

59. The number and qualifications of teaching and support staff are well matched to the needs of the school and its curriculum. All departments are staffed by well qualified teachers with a good range of appropriate specialist knowledge available. Teaching assistants are well deployed and effective in supporting learning and reducing the administrative tasks for teachers. Library support staff make a significant contribution in supporting pupils' learning outside the classroom. Learning mentors are very effective in providing valued support and guidance. Accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. The accommodation for physical education is very poor; there are not enough science laboratories and some of the technology workshops are in need of refurbishment. The school library, though very well used to support learning both in and out of school hours, is too small for the number of pupils in the school. However in most subjects, the accommodation is satisfactory or better. The mobile classrooms are well appointed and provide effective temporary accommodation. The school's new building programme is well advanced and the opening of the new accommodation for music, art and drama is imminent. This will significantly enhance the quality of the accommodation. Although many departments, such as ICT and geography, enjoy a good or very good level of resources and there is a higher number of computers in the school than is normally found, overall, the standard of resources is only satisfactory. There is a shortage of textbooks in the modern foreign languages department which affects the quality of learning. The stock of books in the main library is insufficient for the needs of the school.

### **Sixth Form**

60. The sixth form is well staffed by well-qualified teachers with appropriate specialist expertise for the range of subjects offered. The accommodation for the sixth form is unsatisfactory with a lack of facilities for social and study areas. In particular, the physical education accommodation is very poor. The quality of resources for learning is satisfactory overall but in French the lack of textbooks is a serious weakness which affects the students' learning. The library is also inadequate for the needs of the sixth form students.

### **Care, guidance and support**



Pupils and students are **very well cared for** and receive very good advice, support and guidance. The arrangements for seeking pupils' and students' views are good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pastoral care is of a high standard.
- The quality of support from learning mentors is very good.
- Learning opportunities and personal support out of school hours are excellent.
- Advice, guidance and preparation for the next stages of education are very good overall.

### **Commentary**

61. The school does its best to meet the personal needs of each pupil. Relationships between adults and pupils are constructive, respectful and trusting and pupils feel secure and happy. The induction process effectively enables pupils to settle in. Large numbers of pupils attend the popular breakfast and lunch clubs. Pupils' views are expressed mainly through the school and year councils and they are respected and seriously considered by the school. Teachers foster discussion in personal, social and health education lessons encouraging pupils to express their views objectively and with tact and diplomacy. Child protection, health and safety procedures are very well implemented. All relevant agencies provide specialist services to the school.
62. A team of learning mentors, funded by the Excellence in Cities initiative, provides exceptionally good academic and personal support to large numbers of pupils.
63. Pupils are well aware of the standards they achieve and their predicted and targeted results in all subjects except English. Pupils receive good advice and guidance about how to improve. Extra tuition, learning opportunities out of school hours and a homework club all contribute very well to the achievement of many pupils.
64. Impartial advice and guidance are provided regarding further study and career opportunities. A careers service satisfactorily augments the school's careers education program. Pupils are very well informed about what to expect in the sixth form and full details of courses are provided with appropriate advice, though there are a small number of students who follow courses that are not well matched to their capabilities.

### **Student Support Centre**

65. This provision, based on the school site, is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, is not managed directly by the school and school does not have any pupils attending it. Presently it is running a three week programme for ten pupils who have been bullied. The present group of pupils show they have developed self-confidence during their time at the project as they stand up in front of an audience to present a review of their stay. Parents and learning mentors from the pupils' schools attend the presentation and are kept fully informed so that they are able to follow up the work when the pupils return. All feel it has been a very valuable experience.

## Sixth Form

66. Students in the sixth form receive very good guidance with their studies, based on frequent, careful and sensitive monitoring, and tutors are easily accessible for academic and personal support. Advice and preparation for higher and further education are very good. Social and study facilities for students are good but inadequate at times for the large number of students requiring access. Good opportunities for enrichment are provided. A small number of lower attaining students have been misplaced on over-demanding courses and some do not gain an accreditation in their chosen subjects. This situation is rapidly improving as the school provides a wider range of suitable courses to match students' needs.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a **good** partnership with its parents and works very effectively with other schools and the community.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have a high regard for the school.
- Most parents support well their own children.
- Parents' voluntary involvement in the life of the school is negligible.
- The school's involvement in and with the community is considerable.
- The school works very closely with other schools to promote the next stage of pupils' education.

### Commentary

67. Parents are very pleased with the quality of education and care that is provided. They trust the school and value the support it gives to pupils and families. Parental attendance at meetings is high and they support very well the various events and activities in which their children participate. Parents who have children with special education needs are well involved in the review process. Parents do not voluntarily participate in the daily life of the school or the curriculum and an association to support the school is not currently in place.
68. Parents are well informed about pupils' progress and school matters through reports, consultation, personal contact and newsletters. The prospectus is issued afresh each year in place of a governors' meeting and report. It omits references to facilities for disabled pupils and progress made with the key issues of the previous inspection. It provides no details of staff development. The school tries hard to help parents provide support for their own children at home, for example, by personal advice, guidance booklets and evening courses. Its efforts to engage parents' support for their children's attendance are not always successful.
69. The school is well used by the community for education and leisure purposes. The school uses the wider community very well to enhance pupils' learning and personal development. A youth service project is closely linked with the school. It provides a wide range of services that meets many personal and social needs of the community including pupils and families of the school.
70. Links with primary schools ensure a smooth transfer to the school. Numerous outstanding curricular projects in most subjects contribute to improving continuity of education for the pupils. The school's very effective arrangements with establishments for further and higher education and vocational experiences contribute very much to the quality of learning and preparation for the next stage of pupils' and students' education.

## Sixth form

71. Partnerships with higher and further education institutions are very good and students are well informed of the opportunities available to them both locally and further afield. The school has well established partnerships with local schools and plans for the further expansion of the sixth form provision across five local schools are well under way.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are **good**. Leadership of the headteacher and key staff at all levels is very good. Management at all levels is good. Governance is good but it is not fulfilling some of its statutory duties.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leaders and governors are determined in their efforts to raise standards, promote a caring and supportive ethos and provide high quality education for all pupils whatever their background or needs.
- Strong teams of staff are in place and provide outstanding role models.
- There is a clarity of vision for sixth form improvement and development and a determination to succeed.
- The school has benefited enormously from its status as a Technology College.
- The governing body is very well informed and holds managers to account. It provides strong support and is influential in guiding the school's development, but it is not fulfilling some of its statutory duties.
- The school has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in its work but not all faculties have well developed arrangements for rigorous self evaluation.
- Finances are well controlled and the school pays good attention to gaining best value.

### **Commentary**

72. The headteacher, very ably supported by a very strong leadership group, has a clear vision for the school firmly routed in providing worthwhile relevant educational opportunities for all young people in the local community. The vision is shared by the governors, staff and parents and well thought through plans are put into place with determination to ensure that the vision becomes a reality. This philosophy was reflected in the school's decision to go ahead with the integration of nearby school that was closing. The very well thought out means by which this was carried out, without detriment to the educational experiences of any group of pupils and at the same time managing to sustain rising standards and oversee major building development, is testament to the high quality of the leadership throughout the school.
73. Throughout the recent changes the need to build strong and effective teams of staff in all areas of the school has been pursued with rigour by senior managers and the governors. A very strong senior management team and many very effective heads of faculty and heads of year provide energy and drive and share the vision for the school. Many of them provide outstanding role models to others. With the integration of the nearby school, the headteacher and the chair of governors were personally involved in the appointments of over 50 new staff. The effectiveness of these teams of staff, both teaching and teaching assistants, is reflected in the good quality of teaching and the very good quality of pastoral support provided. Their commitment and loyalty to the school was evident at the start of the inspection week when, out of a staff of more than 160, all but one was in school.
74. The relentless pursuit of improved provision and resulting standards is also seen in the school's success as a Technology College. For example, the much improved provision of ICT and its frequent use as part of teaching and pupils' learning is helping to inspire, interest and motivate pupils across many subjects and high numbers of pupils are gaining a worthwhile

qualification in ICT. Innovative approaches to curriculum development, for example in science and technology, are resulting in success for more pupils in examinations from Year 9 onwards.

75. Staff roles and responsibilities are very clear and so it is assured that the school's plans for improvement, clearly focused on raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and assuring the smooth integration of the new pupils to the school, are implemented with rigour. Each senior manager takes responsibility for a part of the development plan and has oversight of a faculty or other area of the school. They keep a close check on how well the plans are implemented, reporting regularly on developments to the headteacher and governing body. Teachers representing each faculty and focused on a key area, such as the development of literacy skills or the use of assessment, meet regularly to help ensure that best practice and ideas are shared across subjects.
76. Governors are highly committed to the school. They are influential in the school's development and bring a good range of expertise and experience. They welcomed the integration of the closing school in order to assure high quality education for all young people in the local community. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as a result of thorough reports from senior managers. They pick up quickly on strengths and weaknesses and want to find out more. They regularly invite presentations from different faculties and areas of the school either to celebrate their success or explore how best to develop. The governing body, however, does not fulfil some of its statutory duties. Though provision of religious education has improved in the sixth form since the last inspection, not all pupils are taught the locally agreed syllabus in Years 10 to 13. The school still does not provide a daily act of corporate worship, though a well planned weekly assembly provides a good quality experience. Accommodation difficulties prevent the meeting of large groups of pupils and students more frequently than once per week, and efforts to involve class tutors in leading acts of worship in form groups have not been successful. A few of required items are missing from the combined school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents.
77. Rigorous annual review of test and examination results informs the school of areas of strength worth sharing with others and areas in need of support and development. Clear systems of accountability involving senior managers with oversight of faculties and other areas of the work of the school further help leaders to know what is working well and what needs to be improved.
78. Most heads of faculty provide very good leadership, sharing clear views of how their subjects should develop, maintaining a determination to raise standards and leading by example. Good management has helped staff to provide stability for pupils through recent times of change. Well managed teams have continued to improve, for example taking on new approaches to teaching, developing assessment systems and making more use of ICT. Where management is less consistent is in the frequency and rigour of checks within departments. Inconsistencies in how assessment is used or how well homework is used, for example, are not always picked up quickly enough and there can be a detrimental effect on pupils' learning and achievement.
79. Arrangements for performance management are well established and linked to subject priorities which, in turn, are linked to whole school priorities. Arrangements for staff professional development are very good and extend to non-teaching staff. As a result, a number of teaching assistants are well qualified in their roles and they are very effective. The school has a well thought through approach to the best use of teachers' time and is ensuring that teaching assistants are deployed appropriately across subjects to allow teachers more time for preparation and teaching. The school provides good opportunities for trainee teachers and arrangements for new and newly qualified teachers are successful and appreciated.
80. The special needs department is very well led and managed. The provision for a large number of pupils, many with complex needs, is thoughtfully organised to meet individual needs. Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained and kept abreast of all the latest developments so they feel confident when they work with pupils. There is a clear vision of what works well and how to improve the department and a constant striving to improve the

provision. The Governors and the school are committed to including these pupils fully in the school and devote time and money to ensure they are successful in this.

81. The headteacher and governors manage the finances well and are provided with financial information by a very effective finance manager and good computer administrative systems. Best value principles are well established as an approach to managing the school's finances. Although the current unit costs are higher than most school's, taking into account the school's unusual circumstances, the good achievement, positive attitudes and very good behaviour of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds then the school provides good value for money.

**Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,873,218	Balance from previous year	58,215
Total expenditure	5,871,340	Balance carried forward to the next	60,093
Expenditure per pupil	3,330		

**Sixth form**

82. Leadership of the sixth form is very good. A well constructed and detailed development plan shows clearly where the sixth form wishes to go, and more importantly, how it intends to get there. There are very obvious priorities of raising standards, and of realising the potential of students of all abilities. The staff and the students of the sixth form fully share this vision. Leadership is working very effectively to sustain progress for their students at a time of very great change. Delegated responsibilities are clear, and are attached to pastoral and personal development roles, as well as academic roles, under the oversight of an energetic deputy head. Staff are well trained and prepared to enable them to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. The leadership team monitors the quality of teaching throughout the sixth form, as they do throughout the school, but best use is not made of curriculum managers in supporting this role to ensure that standards of learning are consistently high enough.
83. Management of the sixth form is good. Planning at an operational level is well developed, and the sixth form is a smoothly functioning organisation not burdened excessively with paperwork. The sixth form is gathering extensive data on all aspects of the performance of its students, and systems for tracking individuals are becoming more sophisticated. Insufficient opportunity exists for departments to moderate this information, and to therefore make target setting more appropriate for all students in different subject areas. There is very strong evidence to suggest that this will shortly happen.
84. Governance of the sixth form is good. Governors take a full and active role in the monitoring of overall performance throughout the sixth form as well as at subject level. The present rapid expansion of provision could not have taken place without their full support, and an awareness of what the possible outcomes might be. The statutory requirement for the teaching of religious education for all students is not fully met. The senior management team of the school and the governing body are presently working within a city-wide framework to ensure that the quality of provision meets the needs of all students.
85. The finances are well managed and the income the school receives for sixth form students is spent on them and there is no draw on funds allocated to the main school. The sixth form is, therefore, cost-effective.

# PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Other than **English**, **Spanish** was the language inspected in depth, and **French** was sampled. In 2003, GCSE results in French were above average. French is currently taught in Year 8 and Year 10. Two lessons were seen, and pupils' work was sampled. Standards in French are below average overall, and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils achieve very well in Year 10, and in Year 8 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but are very good in Year 10. In year 8, schemes of work do not match the differing learning needs of all pupils, and the progress of the able pupils is too slow. The leadership and management of French are satisfactory.

#### English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Planning is very good for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Teaching is good in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Leadership is good and has provided stability during recent integration of pupils from a nearby school.
- All teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Standards at GCSE are well below the national average.
- Work is not marked regularly enough and assessment information is not used well enough to support learning.
- Checks on teachers' work are not rigorous enough to ensure consistency of good practice.

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Below average	Well below average	Below average
National tests and GCSE in 2003	Below average	Well below average	
Teaching	Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Learning	Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Good		
Management	Satisfactory		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection.	Satisfactory		

#### Commentary

86. Pupils enter school with standards well below the national average and very weak literacy skills. Frequently half of these pupils have reading standards well below that which is expected for their age.
87. Pupils' attainment in the national tests in 2003 at the end of Year 9 was below the national average. This demonstrates very good achievement when compared to pupils in similar schools and is a sharp rise in standards from last year. Standards in writing, reading, speaking and listening seen during the inspection, though still below average, are improving. These improved standards reflect the impact of both a structured curriculum and rigorous teaching methods. Pupils have benefited from discrete reading lessons and a 'buddying' scheme; as a result, reading standards have risen. Overall achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good.

88. Results in GCSE English and English Literature in 2003 were well below the national average with girls outperforming boys. Pupils' achievement by Year 11, based upon their results in Year 9, is satisfactory. There is, however, a polarity effect. The majority of pupils who attend regularly have good or very good achievement but, for a substantial minority of pupils whose attendance is poor or who miss lessons due to attendance on college courses, achievement is unsatisfactory.
89. Standards in the current work in Year 11, though well below average, are slightly higher than the previous year's results and are improving. However, the picture is inconsistent across teaching groups. Written responses to reading are good for pupils of all ages, due to structured teaching which shows pupils how to interrogate a text in order to retrieve appropriate information. Unfortunately few pupils read recreationally and the library is currently under-stocked. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Standards in writing are developing rapidly in GCSE groups where pupils are taught examination techniques and develop more accuracy and control. Creative pieces are weaker, pupils write shorter pieces lacking in variety and imagination. All written pieces are frequently marred by weak spelling and sentence construction.
90. The quality of teaching is good for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is better in Years 7 to 9 because lessons are well structured and follow the National Literacy Strategy. As a result, pupils learn well. Most teachers display good subject knowledge and when this is combined with careful planning and enthusiastic teaching, pupils respond well and make progress. Relationships with pupils are very good. However, marking is not always effective. In Years 7 to 9 it is not focused closely enough on National Curriculum outcomes nor does it give pupils enough detail on what to do to improve. Teachers carefully record attendance and effort grades, but not attainment. The current system does not supply the lead teachers with information on pupils who are underachieving.
91. A team of hardworking and committed teachers has been well led and managed through integration and relocation. The effect of staffing changes has delayed plans to develop assessment, monitoring and the strategic use of ICT. Currently all these aspects are unsatisfactory. The department is now restructured and is well placed to raise standards even further. Further monitoring of teaching will ensure a coherent and consistent approach and the cross-referencing of the very good practice seen during the inspection. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. Improving literacy skills and the use of ICT remain as ongoing challenges but standards in speaking and listening have improved considerably.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

92. The standard of literacy shown by pupils on entry is well below average and is still below average for a significant number of pupils in the present Year 11. Weak literacy skills still have a detrimental effect on standards. GCSE results are seriously depressed because many pupils cannot understand the examination papers owing to weak reading and limited understanding of vocabulary. However, when considering that 70 per cent of the present Year 11 had very low reading skills on entry to the school, their achievement in reading has been good overall.
93. There is very good awareness of literacy across the curriculum. All subjects teach literacy skills alongside their subjects and most departments monitor its development. All teachers use a structured approach to the teaching of reading and writing and provide opportunities for speaking and listening. Good examples were seen in history, religious education, modern foreign languages, science, drama and geography. Pupils are taught technical vocabulary and are well supported when formulating written responses. Very good examples of teaching literacy were seen in English, history and modern foreign languages. However, in a GNVQ ICT lesson, oral skills were less well developed which made the communication of ideas difficult.

94. The management of the development of pupils' literacy across subjects is very good and has focused on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. It is a thorough programme which has already had an impact on raising pupils' reading ability and is now focused on improving writing standards. Not enough checks on how well literacy skills are being taught are carried out by managers to ensure consistency of good practice across all subjects. Not enough subjects share best practice as well as they do in English and modern foreign languages.

## Spanish

Provision in Spanish is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils of all abilities achieve very well in Spanish.
- The leadership of the department is excellent.
- The teachers' fluency in Spanish sets high standards for pupils.
- Boys achieve very well in listening and speaking.
- The department contributes very well to pupils' development in literacy.
- The lack of textbooks limits opportunities for home study.

	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Very good	Very good	Very good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Average	Average
GCSE in 2003	Average		
Teaching	Very good	Very good	Very good
Learning	Very good	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Excellent		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection.	Very good		

### Commentary

95. In GCSE in 2003, against the national trend, boys achieved better than the girls overall.
96. Standards in Year 9 are below average, because most middle and lower attaining pupils write and speak from memory at a basic language level, using mainly the present tense and a sound topic-based vocabulary. Higher attaining pupils reach above average standards. In Years 7 and 8, standards are average and improving because of teachers' increasingly high expectations of their pupils.
97. Pupils of all abilities currently achieve very well in listening and speaking, because of the teachers' consistent use of Spanish in lessons. This enables pupils to understand quickly, and speak confidently with good accents. Boys learn rapidly, responding enthusiastically to the carefully structured lessons and fast pace of learning; in Years 10 and 11 they achieve better in listening and speaking than the girls. In writing, which was a weakness in the last report, pupils make very good progress; the teachers' high expectations of pupils' spelling, grammar and sentence structure contribute effectively to raising the general literacy standards of all pupils. Marking is frequent and thorough; and test results are clearly linked to National Curriculum levels. However, pupils do not always have clear targets for improvement. Pupils understand challenging texts according to their ability; however, the lack of textbooks limits pupils' opportunities for independent study, especially in Years 10 and 11. The scheme of work for Year 7, designed specifically to help pupils learn more rapidly, emphasises very good learning



habits, notably in remembering and re-using Spanish naturally, and this results in all pupils' rapid progress. The department ensures that all pupils, whatever their background or special difficulties, are well supported and succeed; pupils with special educational needs, those whose first language is not English, and the highest attaining pupils all achieve very well.

98. Most of the lessons seen were very good with some excellent features, and one excellent lesson was seen.

#### Example of outstanding practice

##### **In a fast-moving Year 9 Spanish lesson, pupils with very low literacy learned how to speak and write in well structured sentences about their pets.**

The teacher's excellent understanding of pupils' learning needs underpinned all her teaching. Her fluent use of Spanish had enhanced pupils' speaking and listening skills over time; consequently, they answered the teacher's questions quickly and unselfconsciously, with good accents. Planning showed clear steps in learning, progressing from revision and repetition of key words, to full sentence-making, at first in speaking, then in writing, to fully embed use of *ser* and *tener* with nouns and adjectives. The teacher's excellent use of colourful overhead projector transparencies, sheets with large print and well-spaced text - gave these low ability pupils unhindered access to meaning. Pupils proudly showed the teacher their written responses on mini-boards, giving her immediate feedback on their learning, and because the teacher could see their individual efforts, all felt involved and valued. The teacher's consistent reference to the initial lesson objectives successfully shared with pupils her own pleasure in their progress. Finally, the pupils enthusiastically told others about their pets, showing excellent progress in literacy, enjoyment of Spanish and immense pride in their achievement.

99. Teachers' excellent use of resources, especially the interactive whiteboards purchased as a result of the school's Technology College status, motivates all pupils well. Pupils' use of ICT is satisfactory. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning Spanish; however, the progress of a minority is limited by frequent absence.
100. Departmental leadership inspires teachers and pupils with a clear vision, innovative teaching, and highest aspirations. Assessment information is used well to identify and improve weaknesses in pupils' learning. Areas for improvement are clearly identified by the faculty and include management of the small Year 8 Spanish group, and the need to increase pupils' involvement in routine target-setting in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the last inspection is very good: standards have risen, pupils' achievement has substantially improved, and teaching and learning are now very good.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The progress pupils make compares favourably with that made by pupils in similar schools.
- Standards are well below those seen nationally.
- Pupils' behaviour and the attitudes they display in lessons assist their learning.
- Pupils' absence from lessons is affecting standards.
- The department is well led and cohesive with a clearly expressed desire for improvement.
- Teachers' work is not being checked closely enough by managers to prevent some inconsistency in marking of pupils' work and in the quality of lessons taught.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Well below average	Well below average	Well below average
National tests and GCSE in 2003	Well below average	Well below average	-
Teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Good		
Management	Satisfactory		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Satisfactory		

## Commentary

101. During the course of the last academic year and this, the department has been overcoming the challenges of welcoming and successfully integrating pupils and teachers from a nearby school. Lessons continue to be taught on two sites so that some staff have to travel back and forth. In spite of this, morale is high as is the commitment of the staff to improvement.
102. On entry to the school, pupils' standards are well below national norms. The prior attainment levels were further depressed by the addition of those pupils who joined the school from elsewhere. Their standards were, on average, lower than those of existing pupils at Alsop High. In spite of this, results show sound improvement over time. Results in national tests taken in Year 9 have continued to rise at about the same rate as national standards. At GCSE, improvement over time is better than that found nationally. The number obtaining better than grade C has risen to one in four in 2003, from one in six four years ago. The average points score has risen in that time by more than a grade. When compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment, results in national tests for fourteen year olds are well above average. At GCSE too, results for 2003 are well above average compared with schools with a similar profile of prior attainment. Boys perform better than girls but less markedly so in GCSE than in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests.
103. Current standards of pupils' work reflect the test and examination results. In Year 9, just over half of the pupils are approaching or above National Curriculum Level 5, the level expected for their age. In Year 11, over three in ten are capable of achieving a grade C or better at GCSE next summer. Newly organised programmes of work ensure that the National Curriculum is covered in all years. The highest attaining pupils do as well as the highest attainers anywhere, but their numbers are proportionately smaller. The department is providing well for these pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11. For these pupils, early entry for higher level papers in GCSE statistics in Year 10 is paving the way for the most able to prepare for and attempt an AS level module in statistics in Year 11, in addition to taking higher tier examinations in GCSE.
104. Achievement is satisfactory overall but this judgement incorporates an amalgam of good achievement by those whose attendance is regular and unsatisfactory progress by a substantial minority of pupils whose attendance is poor. In none of the lessons seen during the inspection was there a full class of pupils present. On average, one in five pupils was absent from mathematics classes over the inspection as a whole. Apart from this distinction, there was no appreciable difference in the progress made by pupils from different groups. Most pupils for whom English is not the first language at home are fluent and many are native speakers of English. None were seen during the inspection for whom language is a barrier to learning. Those pupils identified as having special educational needs are known to the teachers and they benefit from effective extra support. They progress as well as their peers.
105. Teachers are knowledgeable and all trained to teach mathematics, including one recently appointed at short notice to replace a vacancy arising at Christmas. Lessons are usually well paced with the pupils responding well to the teachers' expectation that they will behave and do their best in class. Good relationships and very good behaviour in lessons are the norm and contribute significantly to pupils' learning. Some lessons are very good, like a Year 7 lesson on angles in which a low attaining group were highly motivated by the quality of the teacher's preparation and delivery of the lesson and by his excellent use of praise and encouragement. Most lessons, however, are workmanlike and unimaginative so that pupils learn but the experience is not always as exciting as it could or should be. Learning is well supported by teaching assistants. Two of these have all their time dedicated to mathematics. Both are

keen and interested as is demonstrated by their continuing their study of mathematics in classes alongside the pupils.

106. Literacy standards are well below the norm. Although sufficient to enable the pupils to read and understand their work in the classroom when the teachers are present to help and guide, they are, to an extent, a cause of weaker test results. Lower attainers often find difficulty in reading questions closely enough to be able to understand what is required. Development of literacy is seen as important, but could be better supported. Teachers are careful when introducing and explaining new vocabulary but do not always use the vocabulary lists on the classroom walls effectively when doing so. Correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar is a weaker feature of marking.
107. The acquisition of Technology College status has had a positive impact on the department's capacity to develop the pupils' skills in ICT. This was seen as a weakness in the previous inspection report but is now much improved. Opportunities for using computers as a tool for learning are well embedded in the schemes of work. Each classroom has a link to the school's network giving access to the Internet.
108. Leadership of the faculty, based on strong capability in mathematics and ably supported by a second in department, is good and holds the respect of the team as a whole. The quality of leadership has been an important factor in the successful integration of the pupils and teachers from the nearby recently closed school into the work of the department. There is a consultative approach to development, which is effective in welding the team together. A good department development plan rightly identifies the priority for development as being to raise standards by closer monitoring of teachers' work to ensure greater consistency and sharing of good practice in lesson delivery and in marking of pupils' work.

#### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

109. The pupils demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are below average but usually sufficient for them to be able to gain access to the other subjects they study. This is not always the case, however. In design and technology, for example, for the most part pupils can cope but there are examples where they cannot. In Year 8, pupils in a resistant materials lesson could not divide 210 mm by two correctly. In Year 9, boys in a food lesson needed help weighing and measuring ingredients accurately; and in Year 10, pupils could not recognise and name common geometrical shapes such as rectangle or cylinder in a product design lesson on the making of biscuits.
110. All teachers have received training in how to recognise and incorporate teaching mathematical ideas in their lessons and a whole-school policy has been written and distributed to all heads of faculty and year. It is also available on the school's intranet. Regular focus group meetings of representatives from each department are contributing to advances in humanities and in science particularly.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good and have led to improved teaching and standards.
- Teaching of the literacy skills of reading, speaking and listening is very good.
- Assessment procedures are very good and provide pupils with very effective support.
- Planning of lessons is very good; it provides variety and demanding teaching.
- Self-evaluation processes within the faculty are very good; they identify areas in which improvement is needed and result in action to improve standards.
- ICT is not used to collect data and the opportunities for independent work offered by ICT are missed.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Below average	Below average
National tests and GCSE in 2003	Well below average	Below average	-
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

### Commentary

111. Year 9 test results in 2003 were well below the national average but, when compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment, they were above average. Results in the GCSE examinations were below the national average, but above average when compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment. Module test results for Year 11 show that results have improved and boys and girls do equally well, although small numbers gain the highest grades.
112. Overall, pupils' knowledge and understanding of science is below the national average. These standards are an improvement on previous standards because of improved leadership, management and teaching. In Year 9, higher attaining pupils' understanding of electric circuits is above average and in Years 10 and 11, work on the differences between transition metals and about the structure of DNA is also above average for these pupils. Although the work of pupils with special educational needs is often well below average, their achievements are good and no different to others in the school. Boys and girls do equally well.
113. Pupils' achievements are good because teachers have high expectations of them. All lessons are well planned and good use is made of the National Strategy to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 so that planning is consistent in all years. Lessons provide varied activities that are well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers use ICT very well to make lessons interesting and to make good use of time. Discipline and relationships are very good and, because they are regularly encouraged, pupils behave very well and work hard. The best lessons are very good or excellent because teachers use demanding questions skilfully, pupils learn quickly and their achievements are very good. Absence, sometimes when on college courses, hinders achievement of lower attaining pupils.
114. Pupils do not write explanations of science often enough but teaching of other aspects of literacy is done consistently and very well in a large majority of lessons. As a result, pupils who

are usually reticent become more confident. Explanations are clear so that pupils know what to do and they carry out practical tasks carefully and safely, they co-operate very well with each other and their teachers. Sometimes achievement is satisfactory, for example, when a practical activity is not used in a lesson to make a difficult idea much clearer, or when pupils are not encouraged and become less willing to answer questions.

115. Assessment is effective and thorough; pupils know their targets and very effective support is provided for pupils who may not reach them. Marking is regular and tests provide information about National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades which are used in reports. In most cases pupils are given guidance about how to improve. Evaluation of the work of the department is very thorough, it identifies areas that need improvement and very effective leadership ensures that it happens. Leaders provide very good role models and support to colleagues; teamwork is very good and has led to improving teaching and GCSE test grades. The majority of teachers are new to the department and have quickly been integrated into the team.
116. Accommodation for science teaching is unsatisfactory, there are not enough laboratories, some do not have enough water or gas supplies and in many there are floor coverings that could be unsafe. Though plans are in hand for its purchase, equipment for teaching data logging is not yet available and so pupils have little experience in its use.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

##### **A Year 10 science lesson about the properties of metals in which skilful use of ICT was combined with demanding questioning so that pupils learned very quickly.**

Excellent relationships, particularly the encouragement given to pupils gave them the confidence to respond to the teacher's high expectations. The lesson was started by providing pupils with samples of metals to look at whilst the teacher used questions to elicit their ideas and to help them to identify the patterns in their observations. Next an electronic white board and a Powerpoint presentation were used to provide pupils quickly and efficiently with a variety of information. Challenging questions drew pupils' attention to relevant features of the information. The presentation was used to move quickly to and from slides about atomic structure and the properties of the metals so that pupils were able to identify the relationship between structure and properties and to provide explanations of the relationships. Pupils were then asked to use the relationships to make predictions about the properties of other metals; they did this successfully.

The teacher gave well-designed record sheets to the pupils so that they could work quickly. Throughout the lessons the teacher's dynamic and demanding approach ensured rapid learning and by the end of the lesson achievement was excellent. Pupils' interest and morale had been raised and they left the lesson with a sense of achievement.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GNVQ examination results in 2003 were well above average; half of the year group took this examination and their achievement was very good.
- Pupils are well taught and their good learning, supported by their very good attitudes, results in good achievement.
- At all levels the subject is very well led and managed.
- Assessment is not always used to inform pupils in Years 7 to 9 where they are at, compared to pupils nationally, and what they have to do to improve.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Average	Average
GCSE in 2003	Average		
GNVQ Intermediate	Well above average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Very good		

## Commentary

117. Results in the 2003 GNVQ Intermediate examination, the first year the school has offered this course, were well above average and pupils who took this course achieved very well. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards but because of the good teaching they receive and their very good attitudes to learning, they make good progress and by Year 9 have competent basic skills in the use of computers. They are aware of the importance of presenting their work with a particular audience in mind but combinations of text and graphics are not well refined and few pupils can produce polished presentations. Databases are competently created but only higher attaining pupils can conduct anything other than simple queries.
118. After Year 9, the school's commendable policy of entering all pupils for an accredited examination in ICT results in all pupils being entered for either a GNVQ or GCSE qualification. As with the National Curriculum course in Years 7 to 9, both courses are well taught. The school's strong team of specialist staff use their very good knowledge and understanding of the subject to explain difficult concepts and processes to pupils in ways that they can understand and benefit from, for example, when showing pupils how to use formulae in spreadsheets. Lessons are challenging and planned very carefully to ensure the needs of all pupils, including gifted and talented pupils and pupils with special educational needs, are fully met. Consequently, pupils gain confidence and make good progress in acquiring new skills and understanding. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently focused on telling pupils how well they are doing in relation to pupils nationally and what they have to do to achieve a higher level. Standards in the GNVQ course are above average. Pupils can work independently of the teacher and use the on-line help facility to good effect. The application of ICT to help businesses become more efficient is well understood. In the GCSE course, standards are below average. Design skills are weak and low literacy skills inhibit pupils' learning and retention of the theoretical aspects of the course.
119. The school governors, as well as a number of key staff, including the Technology College director and curriculum leader, have ensured that the school's specialist Technology College status has had a very positive effect across many key areas of ICT provision. Staffing is excellent with a full complement of specialist staff in place comprising a very good mix of new and experienced teachers. Resources are above average. Pupils rarely have to share a computer and have very good access to computers out of school time. Teachers in all subjects have very good access to computer technology; for example, many teachers have improved their teaching through the use of interactive whiteboards, helping pupils to learn more effectively and achieve higher standards. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is better and statutory requirements are now fully met.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

120. The use of ICT to support pupils' learning across the curriculum is satisfactory. In music and physical education it is very good. In music, where ICT resources are excellent, pupils use specialist software programs for composition, editing and recording. In physical education, data loggers are used to record heartbeats to help pupils understand the relationship between exercise and health and fitness. In mathematics, design and technology, geography and history, computers are used well, both for research using the Internet and for presentation via word processing and desktop publishing software. In design and technology, computer-aided design and manufacturing software is used effectively to help pupils learn. The use of ICT in religious education, modern foreign languages, citizenship and art and design is satisfactory. Only in English, where opportunities for pupils to use ICT in presenting their work are limited, and science, where pupils do not use data loggers to record their results of experiments, is the use of ICT unsatisfactory. Opportunities for pupils with special educational needs to use ICT are very good, particularly in their use of the school's independent learning system

## HUMANITIES

Geography, history and religious education were inspected in depth and are reported in full. Two lessons of the GCSE humanities course, taken by one group in each of Year 10 and Year 11, were sampled. A well taught humanities scheme in Years 10 and 11 is well regarded by pupils who speak highly of the efforts and skills of their teachers. Results in GCSE humanities in 2002 for were well above the national average. No pupils entered the examination in 2003. Standards are at least average and pupils have many opportunities to discuss geographical, historical and religious issues. They particularly enjoyed the module on Martin Luther King and spoke convincingly about the evils of racism and of how it may be challenged. Teaching is good overall and there are examples of where it is very good. Effective classroom management, challenging questions and high-quality resources are strong features. Leadership is very good and teachers have a clear vision for how the subject may be developed further.

### Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and GCSE results remain well below average but are set to improve this year.
- Teaching is good and lessons are well prepared and use very good resources.
- Praise and encouragement are used to good effect and teacher-pupil relationships are good.
- There is scope for improvement in how homework links to class-work and for the extension of fieldwork activities in Years 7 and 8.
- Leadership of the department is very good and priorities are clear.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Well below average	Below average
GCSE in 2003	Well below average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

## Commentary

121. Teachers' assessments of both boys' and girls' work at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show standards to be well below those expected nationally. Current standards of work in Year 9 are improving but still below average. Taking into account pupils' attainment level on entry to the school, and their positive response to good teaching, progress and achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. This is the result of good and sometimes very good teaching that reinforces literacy skills and makes increasing use of ICT to excite and motivate pupils.
122. In 2003, the GCSE results for boys were well below the national average and girls below the national average. Absence from lessons depresses overall achievement and contributes to these below average standards. However, current standards of work in Years 10 and 11, though still well below average, are improving and represents good achievement and suggests there will be an improvement in future examination results.
123. In Year 9, most pupils have gained a good knowledge of world geography and use a variety of inter-related skills to analyse information and make conclusions. Their map-reading skills enable them to understand scale, direction, map references and symbols and they have good experience of analysing large-scale maps to explain the distribution of volcanoes, earthquakes and other natural phenomena. All pupils can describe the results of human activity on the landscape and the most gifted and talented pupils identify and explain the complex interaction of increasing demand for resources and the destructive effects this can have on regions such as the Amazon rain forest. Limited opportunities for fieldwork restrict pupils' first hand experience and understanding of human and physical geography. Pupils with special educational needs cope well with the demands of the subject and, although their work is characterised by less detailed answers, they both keep pace with others and show a good understanding of geographical ideas.
124. In Year 11, pupils have covered the requirements of the GCSE syllabus. They explain the distribution of farming types across the British Isles, understand the problems facing less economically developed countries and use case studies to illustrate the effects of underdevelopment on the lives of ordinary people. Fieldwork is not well developed and there are too few opportunities for pupils to gain first hand experience of human and physical geography. Consequently, written work produced by pupils lacks first hand knowledge and this lowers standards.
125. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and plan their lessons carefully. The resources used in lessons are very good and lessons are fast paced and even exciting. Teachers believe in the value of their subject and teach with commitment and conviction. Praise and encouragement are used to good effect and all lessons have a good and productive teacher-pupil relationship. Less able pupils are helped by a clear literacy strategy, deployed by all teachers, that emphasises and explains key words, includes the use of individual pupil dictionaries and gives most classrooms a literacy corner. This all results in good learning by pupils. Most have the confidence to answer questions and to discuss issues. They are less confident in making written answers and poor literacy skills contribute to this. Homework is set regularly but there is still scope to improve on how this links with and reinforces the work done in class.
126. Very good leadership sets clear priorities and much has been achieved in a relatively short time. The department uses self-evaluation to check on the quality of the performance of staff but not all teachers are yet keeping pace with the demands of the syllabus and there needs to be even more careful checking in order to tackle this.
127. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The department has tackled the issue of non-compliance with statutory requirements and schemes of work are now in place for all year groups. The quality of teaching has improved and the department is committed to continuous improvement in the quality of pupils' learning. The number of pupils opting to take the subject



from Year 10 onwards has trebled in the last year. Examination results have not yet matched this improvement but standards of work observed at both key stages suggest that this will soon happen.

### Example of outstanding practice

**This fast paced Year 9 Geography lesson was one in a series on the tectonic processes at work under the earth's crust.**

The lesson got off to a prompt and exciting start when pupils responded to word definitions read out by the teacher and pictures on the whiteboard by holding up true or false cards. Work done in the previous lesson was revisited as well as learning new words. The latter were entered into individual pupil dictionaries.

A swift change to viewing a video on the whiteboard gave pupils a real insight into the awesome nature of earthquakes and their destructive effects. The quality of both picture and sound made the experience almost real. Pupils read a textbook extract describing the reasons for earthquakes and their distribution and a question and answer session followed. The teacher used praise and encouragement to excellent effect and all pupils were involved equally. This set the scene for a short written exercise that required pupils to use a combination of map skills, previous knowledge and the textbook extract. Pupils with special needs benefited from using a prepared framework to help them structure their writing. Throughout this exercise the interactive whiteboard provided a dramatic backdrop of exploding volcanoes and background music and, on completion of the written work, the entire class focused on it again to look at an Internet site which was a seismic monitor of recent earthquake activity. They were able to see and to discuss with great excitement, a world map that showed earthquake activity during the past two weeks and look at live updates to this information as earthquakes happened.

The lesson ended with a word bingo session that caught the imagination of the entire class. The aim was to get a line of words that matched definitions read out by the teacher. The first successful pupil had to justify his full line by explaining the meanings of his words back to the teacher. The bingo was continuing for a full house when the bell went. There was an audible groan with several pupils spontaneously asking, "Can we just finish this first sir?"

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although below average, standards are improving year-on-year.
- A wide range of teaching methods leads to pupils achieving well in all years.
- Leadership is very good, provides a clear vision for development of the subject and ensures that pupils are opting for GCSE study in increasing numbers.
- Departmental display is very good and classrooms are adorned with pupils' work.
- The subject fosters the development of pupils' literacy skills.
- Marking is good overall, but pupils are not always aware of the levels at which they are working in Years 7 to 9.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Below average	Below average
GCSE in 2003	Well below average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

## Commentary

128. Although GCSE results were well below average in 2003, there has been a steady upward trend in the percentages of pupils reaching the higher grades and boys are now reaching the same standards as girls. Work produced by the pupils demonstrates that they are making good progress across each year in acquiring historical skills. All pupils, irrespective of their ability levels, achieve well because teachers work hard to supply them with challenging and thought-provoking resources and because strong individual support for their efforts is present in every lesson. Pupils in Year 7 are already beginning to talk confidently about bias and those in Year 8 show how much they know about the reign of Henry VIII by writing their own plays about his six wives and just why he wanted a son to succeed him. In Years 10 and 11, they analyse source material with skill and verve, give convincing reasons for the failure of the Weimar Republic and use the views of famous historians to discuss the rise to power of Adolf Hitler. The assignments they produce do much to enhance their literacy skills and there are many examples of them using ICT to produce their work.
129. History is becoming an increasingly popular GCSE subject because pupils are motivated by a wide range of teaching methods and because teachers pass on their undoubted enthusiasm for their subject. Although there are examples of pupils not being fully engaged, the vast majority of lessons are a pleasure to visit and youngsters are fascinated by the subject-matter. These lessons move at a fast pace and develop into a dialogue between teachers and pupils. Questions come thick and fast and pupils benefit from so many opportunities to work in groups and to learn from and with their classmates. In an excellent Year 10 lesson, for example, taught in a model history classroom, pupils were challenged to such a degree that they surprised themselves at how effectively they interpreted the sources to come to an accurate view of what America was like during the 'Roaring Forties.' From plays to the use of the electronic whiteboard and from group discussion to individual presentations, teachers meet their pupils' learning needs. Teaching is, therefore, good overall and there are many examples of where it is very good and excellent.
130. This is a good and rapidly improving department, in which the very good leadership has ensured high-quality display in every classroom, good improvement since the last inspection and which has raised the profile of history throughout the school. There are now opportunities for historical visits in every year. Teachers are now looking to improve the accuracy of assessment at the end of Year 9 and to share best practice more effectively in order that the quality of teaching is more consistent.
131. The department has benefited enormously from the creation of an outstanding facility funded by the Creative Partnership initiative. Pupils have contributed significantly to producing a highly imaginative history classroom that combines the latest technology, artefacts, resources, staging and lighting. The result is a working area where a wide range of different learning experiences are created and that pupils find an enjoyable and stimulating place to learn.

#### **Example of excellent practice**

##### **A Year 10 history GCSE lesson on analysing sources of evidence on the 'Roaring Twenties'.**

High expectations, relentless challenge and excellent use of the electronic whiteboard led to this Year 10 lesson on the 'Roaring Twenties' becoming a continuous dialogue between the teacher and pupils. The youngsters were fascinated by the subject matter and were desperate to give contributions. Because the teacher had placed emphasis on how source material may effectively be interpreted, pupils surprised themselves at the amount of information they were able to deduce from the documents available to them. This outstanding lesson demonstrated just how it is possible to teach young people about the nature of historical evidence and how to ensure that objectivity becomes second-nature to them.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The statutory requirement to teach religious education to all pupils in Years 10 and 11 is not met.
- No discrete teaching of religious education takes place in Years 10 and 11. Standards are, therefore, well below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus in Years 10 and 11.
- The teaching seen in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- Artefacts, music, videotapes and Powerpoint presentations are used well in Years 7 to 9.
- Measures to overcome weaknesses in pupils' literacy are good.
- The department teaches knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Judaism well in Years 7 to 9.
- Good guidance and good resource materials help the mainly non-specialist staff to teach the subject effectively in Years 7 to 9.
- Day-to-day management of the subject in Years 7 to 9 is good.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Standards of work seen	Average	Well below average	Below average
Teaching	Good	Not enough seen	Good
Learning	Good	Not enough seen	Good
Leadership	Unsatisfactory overall but good at departmental level		
Management	Unsatisfactory overall but good at departmental level		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Unsatisfactory		

### Commentary

132. In Year 9, the majority of the pupils attain standards close to the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and this represents good achievement and progress in the light of their prior attainment on entry into the school. In Year 11, standards are well below national expectations because statutory requirements to teach all pupils the locally agreed syllabus are not met and most pupils do not have the opportunity to build upon their learning of Years 7 to 9. Where a small number of pupils study aspects of religion, such as the moral issues in GCSE humanities, there is a positive contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some aspects of religious education, such as moral issues are well covered in personal, social and health education lessons or citizenship, which is taught to all pupils.
133. In Years 7 to 9 pupils with special educational needs and those designated as gifted and talented attain appropriate standards and make good progress because the department makes good use of modified materials and uses extra support in class.
134. The department has good strategies for overcoming pupils' weakness in literacy skills. Pupils' use of numeracy skills is satisfactory. Skills in ICT are used to good effect on the intranet and in the production of Powerpoint presentations for use in assemblies and in lessons, although the main teaching room does not have the equipment for staff and pupils to fully demonstrate their ICT skills. The assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is satisfactory and the religious education provision makes a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in Years 7 to 9.

135. The work seen in lessons and in exercise books shows that pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are able to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other major religions as required by the agreed syllabus. They describe the chief beliefs and the significance of signs and symbols and Holy Scriptures of different groups of believers. They show themselves to be respectful and co-operative learners and they respond well to the mainly good teaching they receive. What they learn *about* religions in terms of knowledge and understanding is a little more obvious than what they learn *from* religions, in the sense of what they apply to their own personal set of values, but they do develop a respect for the opinions of other people.
136. Much of the teaching in Years 7 to 9 is in the hands of competent non-specialist teachers who are helped by the production of good course materials. The good teaching is characterised by good planning and organisation and by delivery in brisk purposeful steps so that clear objectives are achieved in a good learning atmosphere for pupils of all backgrounds. Some important aspects of the leadership and management of the religious provision are unsatisfactory in that the school has failed to comply with statutory requirements in respect of religious education over three inspections. Leadership and management on a day-to-day level in Years 7 to 9 are good.

## TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology courses were inspected in depth.

137. The **child development course** in Years 10 and 11 was sampled. One lesson of child development was observed in Year 11. Teaching and learning were good with standards below average but representing good achievement for these pupils. Pupils displayed great interest in the work when learning about how different toys can influence children's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development. In 2003, GCSE results were well below average when compared with all schools. Results overall show pupils obtained results lower than in their other subjects. This is explained by a significant number of girls, many with low prior attainment, who joined the course from another school which recently integrated with Alsop High School.

### Design and technology

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management of the subject are having a positive effect on standards.
- Good teaching from subject specialists enables pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils have a good attitude to learning and behave well because classroom relationships are good.
- The weak literacy skills of many pupils affect overall standards.
- Pupils enjoy practical work and handle tools and materials safely and confidently.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Below average	Below average
GCSE in 2003	Well below average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

## Commentary

138. Pupils enter school with standards that are well below average and very little experience of the subject. Teachers' assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 shows that although there is improvement, standards remains well below average. The well below average GCSE results in 2003 do not represent the whole year group as the subject was optional at the time. Many of the more able pupils chose to study languages. Some variation exists between the results in different material areas. Results in electronics have been well above those in other material areas and at or above national average for some years. Results in resistant materials have been very low but represent good achievement for boys with very low prior attainment. Results in food were low because they include a high proportion of girls integrated from another school who had little prior knowledge of the subject when they arrived and who completed the course in a reduced time. This accounts for the overall poorer performance of girls in this subject compared to their other subjects. Pupils have tended to opt very traditionally for technology subjects in the past. Sound strategies are being implemented to redress the gender imbalance that currently exists.
139. During the inspection, the work seen was better than teachers' assessment and examination results would indicate. This is because pupils throughout the school are better at practical work than they are at producing written evidence of design decisions. All pupils are making progress and achieving well, including the gifted and talented, those with special educational needs, girls and boys. Pupils are good at generating ideas and working through the design process. Weak literacy skills hinder pupils when completing written work in Years 7 to 9. A higher proportion of pupils than seen normally in Years 10 and 11 have reading skills below average and this, coupled with weak written communication skills, affects their performance in examinations. Most pupils are confident to explain their work orally. Pupils make good use of ICT for a range of purposes when working. Although pupils appear to learn well in individual lessons, many pupils in Years 7 to 11 are unable to retain subject knowledge over time. Poor attendance affects standards, mainly in Years 10 and 11, and some pupils' work suffers due to erratic, sporadic or prolonged absence. This occurs predominantly, but not exclusively, with lower attaining pupils in Year 10.
140. The subject is taught by a team of enthusiastic subject specialist teachers. Good additional support is provided by classroom assistants and technicians. Very good classroom relationships exist which promote good learning. Teachers use praise and encouragement appropriately to motivate pupils. Pupils develop a good attitude to the subject and behave well. The work is very well planned to make it interesting and to take account of and improve weak literacy skills and the weak numeracy skills of some low ability pupils. Teachers are effective in developing the good creative skills of pupils and in helping them to acquire practical skills and to work safely. There are good assessment procedures in place and information about pupils is disseminated to staff. There is some inconsistency, however, in the use of this data by teachers in day-to-day teaching. Pupils are encouraged to work independently but many find this difficult. Pupils are kept well informed of their progress by teachers and know what needs to be done to improve.

141. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of faculty has a clear vision for the department that is shared. A well thought out development plan exists to move the department forward in the next stage of Technology College status. Technology College status has had a significant impact on the accommodation, resources, subject initiatives and the ability of the school to recruit high calibre teachers. Since the previous inspection, pupils' achievement has improved, the good quality of teaching has been maintained and resources have improved significantly. More pupils now take a technology course in Years 10 and 11.

**Example of outstanding practice**

**A new initiative designed to aid transition from primary to secondary school, provides training for primary school teachers in technology and raises standards on entry to the school. It is funded through the Technology College Status bid and the National Strategy to raise standards and improve continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3.**

The initiative takes place on two afternoons each week and involves two teachers from Alsop. The teachers go into primary school and undertake the first part of a module of work which introduces pupils to the design process. The pupils then come to Alsop school and go on to develop this work in either textiles or resistant materials. They use modern technologies which include Computer Aided Design and Computer Aided Manufacture (CAD/CAM) and modern materials to produce a high quality product like a desk tidy in acrylic or a banner showing all the different faces in the group worked in fabric. Pupils arriving at Alsop for their first session were overcome with awe and wonder when they recognised faces on a banner, the work of their friends in a previous group prominently displayed. The effect of this was that they themselves were highly motivated to tackle the work when they saw what had been achieved.

**VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

**Art and design**

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

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Well focused teaching leads to very effective learning.
- Standards and results are well above average.
- Skills in drawing and painting are very good.
- Skills in speaking and writing about art are insufficiently developed.
- Pupils do not have sufficient experience in using computers to research and create art.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 11	Overall
Achievement	Very good	Very good	Very good
Standards of work seen	Well above average	Well above average	Well above average
GCSE in 2003	Well above average		
Teaching	Very good	Very good	Very good
Learning	Very good	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Very good		

**Commentary**

142. Pupils arrive with very limited skills and experience in art and design and, by the end of Year 9, assessment results show that girls and boys are achieving well above the national average in art. GCSE results, for both boys and girls, have been consistently well above the national average. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. These standards

represent very good achievement for all groups of pupils in Years 7 to 11. Pupils learn how to look with accuracy and develop very good practical craft skills in drawing and painting. They are introduced to a range of different artists' work and learn new techniques, such as printmaking and how to use pastels, which they employ creatively to a very high standard. Colour is understood and applied with lots of verve. Pupils are now beginning to understand how to use computers creatively. In one lesson they were taking digital photographs of each other, which they were able to successfully manipulate to help them produce small, delightful, figurative sculptures in the style of Anthony Gormley. However, this part of the course, while promising, is not yet as well developed as would be expected. Pupils are beginning to make progress in acquiring and using an art vocabulary but they lack experience in speaking and writing about what they see and think when looking at art.

143. The teachers have very good knowledge of art and design and work hard to deliver the well-considered scheme of work. They are very effective in communicating their own enthusiasm for art and design to their pupils. Lessons are interesting and this results in pupils becoming totally engrossed in their tasks, working hard and learning very effectively. A great strength of the teaching is the regular individual practical help that is provided to all pupils, enabling them to rapidly acquire essential craft skills. Each pupil's work is regularly assessed and pupils have a clear understanding of what they have to do in order to improve. Pupils are surrounded by exemplar artwork in all the studios which helps to set high standards. This display is often imaginative, for example, one group had re-interpreted the paintings of Henri Rousseau by turning their studio into a forest. Art and design is popular and large numbers of boys and girls stay on after school finishes for extra tuition in the innovative Cyberlink programme. Gifted and talented pupils are provided with exciting and demanding tasks and this is contributing to some pupils now being entered for examinations earlier than expected.
144. This is a very good department with a teaching team that is a strength of the school. The two previous outstanding issues have been addressed; firstly, pupils are now able to appreciate and explore the art of other cultures, and, secondly, the department is now coming together in a new building. The increase in pupil numbers has been managed very well and the high standards and good progress seen at the last inspection have been maintained.

## Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good use of teaching assistants ensures that all pupils, whatever their background or special difficulties, do well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is good.
- GCSE results are well below average.
- Extra-curricular activities are good.
- ICT is not used well enough due to a shortage of resources.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Average	Above average	Average
GCSE 2003	Well below average		
Teaching	Satisfactory	Good	Good
Learning	Satisfactory	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Not applicable		

## Commentary

145. Pupils' attainment on entry for speaking and listening is well below average but develops rapidly in drama and, by the end of Year 9 is much improved. Results in GCSE were well below the national average and demonstrates a surprising dip from the 2002 results. This lower attainment was directly linked to syllabus changes and to staffing difficulties in which two-thirds of pupils were affected. Current standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are much higher and are in line with national expectations. Achievement is good overall. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs achieve very well in performance. One class, using realistic and credible role-plays, were making sensitive interpretations of 'Blood Brothers'. By the end of the GCSE course, pupils have been well supported and they produce high quality coursework. Its superb presentation reflects the pupils' positive and enthusiastic attitude to the subject.
146. Teachers plan carefully using challenging drama theorists such as Brecht and Stanislavski. Lessons are planned into carefully structured sequences and are very well supported by a very knowledgeable teaching assistant. As a result all pupils, including those with special educational needs make good progress.
147. Assessment is good. Pupils are clear about the skills they need and what they need to do in order to improve. The pupils' use of assessment clearly raises the standards in drama. Currently, the use of ICT is poor due to the lack of access to resources and much course work is completed beyond the lesson.
148. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Inspiring leadership has already enthused and motivated the team into using many new strategies and there is an absolute commitment to ensuring that all pupils succeed, whatever their background or special difficulties.
149. The drama curriculum is further enriched by links with the Community Theatre, Liverpool and John Moore's Universities, where pupils have the opportunity to experience live theatre. Accommodation is still a weakness but the new purpose-built studios are due for completion later this year.

## Music

Provision in music is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The leadership and management are good.
- Pupils do better than could be expected in relation to their standards on entry.
- The resources for ICT are outstanding and well used.
- Assessment and marking are insufficiently structured and informative to pupils as to how well they are doing.



Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average	Average	Below average
GCSE 2003	Below average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Good		
Management	Good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

## Commentary

150. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards and make good progress to attain below average standards in Year 9. They continue to achieve well in reaching average standards in Year 11. GCSE results in 2003, although still below the national average in terms of the proportion gaining A\* to C grades, showed a significant improvement on the previous two years. Few pupils achieved the highest grades but average and lower attaining pupils did much better than could be expected. Pupils respond well to the mood of music when listening and have a good sense of pulse and rhythm. In Years 10 and 11 pupils use ICT confidently and effectively when composing. Although pupils show an understanding of musical notation, when playing keyboards they are still over-dependent on letter names rather than the music. In Years 7 to 9, performances lack fluency but pupils in Years 10 and 11 respond well to the individual instrumental and vocal lessons that are provided and show a good feel for style and idiom in both performance and composition. In all years there are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well.
151. Lessons are well planned with work well matched to the pupils' interest and ability. For example, Year 9 pupils study the use of music by the media, covering a good range of examples drawn from popular and classical music. In Years 10 and 11, the teachers use ICT very effectively as a way of helping students to compose music and overcome problems of writing music down. The teachers also use ICT well as a teaching tool for demonstration. In a Year 11 class, the teacher used a pupil to demonstrate to the class the instruments comprising a full drum kit. Simultaneously, the teacher reproduced the sounds on the computer, using the software program that the pupils would use to compose their own pieces. As the pupil played characteristic percussion rhythms and effects, the teacher echoed them, thus showing the class, very effectively, the sounds the instruments make, what they look like, and how they can use them in their compositions. The pupils work well independently, concentrating when practising or composing on keyboards. Behaviour is good and enables the pupils to work productively. The attitudes to the subject are very good and this is reflected in the very high take-up for GCSE music, which is well above the national average. Although pupils' work is all marked, there is a lack of comments on how pupils can improve. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are all well involved in all the learning activities. The department also uses its learning support assistants well to give a good level of individual attention. This is particularly evident when the pupils are using ICT.
152. The department is well led and managed. It has come through a difficult period of school reorganisation and the logistic problems caused by the split site. A team has been created which is able to teach both class and instrumental work effectively. Since the last inspection, the achievement in Years 10 and 11 has improved. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. ICT facilities are outstanding. The new accommodation, which is almost completed, is a significant improvement that will enable the department to continue and build on the good progress that has been made.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good teaching ensures good learning.
- Very good attitudes ensure good achievement for all groups of pupils.
- Very good leadership and management underpin pupils' good achievement.
- The very poor on-site accommodation forces severe loss of teaching time.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Above average	Above average	Above average
GCSE results in 2003	Average		
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Very good		

### Commentary

153. In 2003, examination results fell below their previously above average level, but remain amongst the highest in the school. There were sound reasons for this, which were related to the assimilation of another school. It does not represent a trend. Well-founded evidence suggests that this will not be repeated. The vast majority of the very large number of pupils who sat the exam did better in this subject than they did in most of the other subjects they took. There were no significant differences in the performances of any groups of pupils.
154. In all years, pupils reach above average standards making good progress in lessons and this builds to good achievement over time. Comprehensive assessments for all pupils demonstrate this clearly. Boys in Year 7 rapidly improved their hockey skills, lowering their sticks with correct technique to control the ball whilst moving at pace. Year 8 girls worked well in groups in gymnastics to develop tableaux balances using techniques of tension and counter-tension. They showed total faith in each others' ability to carry out demanding tasks accurately. A mixed group of Year 11 pupils developed their racket control, footwork and anticipation in high pace conditioned games of badminton. Pupils improve their physical skills by modifying their performances in the light of regular self-evaluations. They have a good knowledge of the effects of exercise on the body. There are no variations in the progress made by different groups of pupils. Attendance and punctuality are good.
155. Teaching is consistently good. This high quality ensures that good learning takes place, thus leading to good achievement for all groups of students. The best teaching is stimulating to pupils, places challenging demands on them to learn quickly, and is enjoyable and energetic. Class management is always very good, and this ensures that pupils spend the maximum amount of the limited time available engaged in learning activities. Teachers work hard to improve the basic skills of pupils by insisting that pupils use the correct technical language of the subject, and by interchanging numerical concepts wherever possible. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good, and the pupils have very good attitudes to learning. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to plan and evaluate their own work and the work of others. In the examination groups, detailed and demanding homework is set consistently, and is marked regularly.

156. Pupils of all ages are very well behaved and have very good attitudes to learning. These are strong contributing factors to their overall good achievement. They are unfailingly tolerant of the different views and abilities of their peers, and they work well when not under direct supervision.
157. The well-balanced teaching team has a clear focus on raising standards. The team works with determination and commitment to overcome the very difficult conditions imposed on it by totally inadequate accommodation, and the sometimes huge numbers of pupils from different age groups who arrive for lessons at the same time. Pupils know how well they are progressing, although the department does not set individual targets for its pupils, nor does it make regular formal checks on the quality of learning. Over two-thirds of pupils take part in activities outside the school day and this contributes strongly to consolidating learning. All areas of concern raised at the last inspection have been tackled. The overall quality of teaching is more consistent and standards continue to rise.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **The school offers good provision for vocational courses and work-related learning.**

Progression routes are available in all vocational subjects. Vocational subjects were first offered six years ago and have increased in line with Government initiatives and further expansion is planned into hard technology as part of the bid for Technology College Status. Planning is already started for changes which will occur in 2007, when all subjects will become applied. More than half the pupils in Years 10 and 11 take vocational subjects. They are given some direction into subjects in order to meet their needs but are still given a choice. Five vocational subjects are currently being offered to pupils and some pupils follow an alternative work-related learning course. Health and social care was inspected in depth and other courses were sampled.

### **Science**

Science is a new course just started in Year 10 so there are no examination results yet.

158. The teaching is good. Literacy skills are taught very well and numeracy skills are taught well. There is sufficient challenge in the work to meet the needs of all abilities and good opportunities exist for independent learning. However, insufficient use is made of ICT particularly for data logging.

### **Leisure and tourism**

In 2003, results are good for the 9 pupils who entered GNVQ Intermediate.

159. Seven pupils achieved merits and two gained passes. Leisure and tourism 11-16 double award has not yet been examined but standards are judged to be good in the lessons seen. Travel and Tourism AVCE (Level 3 course) standards are good on the evidence seen, but there are no examination results to date. In the work seen, pupils make very good use of ICT to facilitate independent learning. Skill in literacy is encouraged and supported. Pupils gain an understanding of the vocational context by work placements and visits. Teachers are well trained, and experienced teachers have upgraded their skills. Teachers are well aware of assessment criteria and this information is shared with pupils. These courses are primarily filled by low attaining pupils but travel and tourism has become the second most popular subject in the school, and this is inclusive.

## ICT

In 2003, about one-third of the year group, ninety-nine pupils, were successful in gaining a full GNVQ Intermediate in this subject. These pupils were primarily the higher achievers in this school. The teaching is good and basic ICT skills are developed well.

## Business education

One lesson of business education was observed.

160. Teaching and learning were good and pupils found the work challenging. They made good progress in developing their understanding of different leadership styles and the positive and negative impact of each style when applied to managing a workforce. Good attitudes and behaviour supported pupils' learning. Standards were average. Results in 2003 were good with pupils gaining pass grades in GNVQ Part 1 Intermediate and Part 1 Foundation. There were, however, no higher grades but achievement was appropriate for these pupils.

## Work-related education

The school provides a very good programme of work-related education.

161. Currently there are 23 pupils in Year 10 and 25 pupils in Year 11 involved, but this varies from year to year depending on the need. Pupils are selected by heads of year, either because they have a particular interest in a vocational area, like cars for example, or to motivate pupils who are disaffected, in danger of dropping out of school or whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion. Individual programmes are drawn up depending on the pupil's need. There are a number of possible elements to the programme as well as time in school to take GCSEs if appropriate. These include, vocational training, work experience with 'Work Learn' college provision, which may link with the increased flexibility project, and The Walton Youth Project helps pupils who frequently do not attend school. The quality of the courses and pupils' attendance on them are all checked by the manager from the school and records are kept of all pupils. Constant feedback is given to school on pupils' progress from outside agencies. Child protection procedures are in place. All pupils have learning mentors provided by the school. There has been very good feedback from pupils and their parents and some pupils have been rescued from potentially dangerous situations in the community. The attendance of these pupils has improved, although figures for current groups are not yet available. There are opportunities for progression once the initial course has been completed. Funding for these initiatives is well used and comes from a variety of sources, including the government, the Learning Skills Council, European funding, the Croxteth Trust and others.

## Health and Social Care

Provision in health and social care is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enjoy the subject and achieve well.
- Teaching is good and incorporates a range of teaching styles and strategies.
- The use of ICT as a tool for learning is having a positive effect on learning.
- There is not enough technical equipment to support learning.
- Pupils are not made fully aware of the range of possible career routes.

Aspect	Years 10 and 11
Achievement	Good
Standards of work seen	Average
Examination results in 2003	Average
Teaching	Good
Learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	This subject was not reported separately.

## Commentary

162. Courses have changed recently because of national changes and because teachers have found that the GNVQ foundation course was de-motivating for pupils, the highest possible grade being a D. The last group through is the current Year 11. An Intermediate GNVQ group operates from the Long Lane site. The GCSE double award has been introduced into Year 10 as a new course this year. It is seen as a much better option for pupils because it offers a more suitable course structure and better career opportunities.
163. In 2003, low numbers of pupils followed the Part 1 GNVQ (foundation) and the full GNVQ (foundation) courses. Pupils generally achieved in line with predictions based on prior attainment. Higher numbers of pupils opted for the full GNVQ intermediate examination and they also achieved in line with predictions, with a few pupils achieving high grades.
164. Overall standards are average. In a Year 10 mixed-ability group, standards are average and achievement is good. In a unit of work on healthy lifestyles, pupils make good progress in learning about smoking and related issues. They show good recall of previously covered work on alcohol and, in class discussion, are willing to participate and to explain research findings from the Internet. Unit work is well presented by word processing. Absence rates are not significant here.
165. Current standards of work in a low ability Year 11 group were well below average and are affected by a high rate of absence. Many pupils in this group have reading ages below what is needed to access an examination paper. In a lesson observed, they struggled to understand the requirements of a paper presented to them by way of revision for an examination the following day. The pupils had a good attitude on the whole and asked questions when they do not understand. Much of the work had been covered before in this subject and also in child development, but retention of subject matter, particularly subject specific vocabulary was poor. Written work also showed an inability to fully grasp the subject matter. However, all these pupils are on course to achieve appropriately in relation to their prior attainment and are likely to obtain a lower grade pass at GCSE.
166. The course is well planned. Lessons are made interesting and contain a variety of activities. Teachers encourage pupils to become independent learners. Good relationships exist which promote good learning and foster pupils' willingness to learn. Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented are well catered for in this subject because they are provided with opportunities to achieve their potential. Teachers mark work to the examination board criteria and pupils receive good feedback and act on how to improve. There is a need, however, to provide an increased number of technical resources, particularly to support health related units in order to increase understanding. There is good and well used provision for ICT in the subject base and other teaching areas. Currently, only a few boys opt for this course. Awareness of potential career opportunities for them is being raised at parents' evenings, for example to increase recruitment on to the course.

167. The recently appointed subject co-ordinator is providing good leadership and management of the subject and new courses have been successfully introduced. There are appropriate progression courses in the sixth form, but pupils generally do not have a good understanding of possible career routes.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

### Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership has ensured thorough preparation for the introduction of the programme and has provided relevant and thought-provoking resources for the pupils.
- Teaching is good and pupils benefit from the knowledge and expertise of a variety of outside speakers.
- The subject is also developed outside the formal classroom and pupils take part in a range of practical activities to help them become responsible citizens.
- There is not yet a comprehensive audit of where the subject is taught across all subjects.
- Pupils' achievement in citizenship is reported in Years 10 and 11 but their progress is not yet gauged in Years 7 to 9.
- Procedures for checking on how well the programme is taught are not formalised.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Good	Good	Good
Standards of work seen	Average	Average	Average
Teaching	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good
Leadership	Good		
Management	Satisfactory		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Not applicable		

### Commentary

168. Pupils are beginning to develop a keen social awareness and a recognition of the importance of their place in society and of how to act as responsible citizens, sensitive to the needs of others. They demonstrate a good understanding of discrimination in all its forms and how this may be combated. Their communication skills are fostered and they speak confidently about positive and negative aspects of many areas of life. Moreover, because citizenship is taught as part of the personal, social and health education programme in Years 7 to 9 and because it appears as a stand-alone subject in Years 10 and 11, pupils see the value of what it has to offer. Furthermore, they benefit from many opportunities to take part in a range of practical activities in school, such as the anti-litter initiative, the garden project and the school council. They are, therefore, seeing the effect of positive action in many areas of the school.

169. Teaching is good and high-quality resources, designed to inform them about good citizenship in all its forms, enhance pupils' learning. Lessons are well planned, delivered with enthusiasm and artefacts are used realistically. In addition, outside speakers visit the school on a regular basis to share their ideas, on money management, for example. Pupils respond well and speak highly of the other opportunities they have in school to act as informed citizens. In Years 10 and 11, their progress is reported formally each year and teachers are now looking to extend this assessment into Years 7 to 9.

170. The school has prepared well for the formal introduction of the subject and leadership is good. Teachers have spent considerable time considering where citizenship content is already taught and have even completed an audit of where the subject appears outside the classroom walls. However, there is not yet a full awareness of the part played in all subject areas and checks on the quality of how it is taught are only in their infancy. Nonetheless, there is a clear vision for how citizenship will develop.

## Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject makes a significant contribution to the raising of pupils' self-esteem and confidence in what they can achieve in all areas of school life.
- Leadership is very good, has a thorough understanding of the differing needs of pupils in the school and ensures continuous development of the subject.
- Teaching is very good and pupils benefit from high quality resources produced by the staff.
- The subject is popular with the pupils and they see the value of what is on offer.

Aspect	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 11	Overall
Achievement	Very good	Very good	Very good
Standards of work seen	Average	Average	Average
Teaching	Very good	Very good	Very good
Learning	Very good	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good		
Management	Very good		
Changes in effectiveness since the previous inspection	Good		

### Commentary

171. Personal, social and health education is popular among the pupils and they value its relevance to their lives and to the raising of their confidence. Pupils in Year 8, for example, speak warmly of the social relationships module and say that they have learned how to become better friends to their classmates. They adopt a mature approach to the vexed question of alcohol and are fully aware of the dangers of its abuse. Moreover, in Years 10 and 11, they are beginning to develop a keen social conscience and are already discussing, for example, how they can improve their practice in recycling a range of products. Pupils have a high regard, also, for the work of the year and school councils and say that their elected representatives support them well and have been able to make a real difference in many areas of school life.

172. Teachers foster discussion and encourage their pupils to express their views objectively and with tact and diplomacy. Because pupils enjoy what is on offer and recognise the relevance of the subject-matter, they behave very well and display very good attitudes to their studies. They benefit, too, from well-planned activities, challenging questions, a rapid pace in most lessons and also humour. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good indeed.

173. A total commitment to the importance of the subject and to the pupils following it is just one feature of the very good leadership of the personal, social and health education programme. Resources are of high quality and are of direct relevance to the needs of each individual pupil and to their personal, social and academic development. Moreover, materials are reviewed on a regular basis and amended accordingly. In addition, a wide range of outside speakers add to the richness of the curriculum. The department has made good progress since the last

inspection, has received the Healthy Schools Award and is, therefore, well placed for further success.



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the sixth form, 11 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.

The tables 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	4	100	98.6	0	50.2	60	87.5
Biology	1	100	96.3	0	39.2	40	78.6
Business Studies	5	100	98.7	0	36.8	60	80.1
Drama	1	100	99.5	0	40.1	40	83.5
Electronics	5	80	N/A	0	N/A	36	N/A
English Lit	12	92	99.4	0	36.3	55	80.1
French	2	100	98.7	0	51.5	50	87.6
Graphics	3	66	N/A	0	N/A	33	N/A
Gen Studies	27	78	94.6	0	31	43	73.1
ICT	3	100	95.6	0	24.6	66	69.5
Maths	1	100	96.7	0	55.6	40	88.8
PE	5	100	97.9	0	30.9	72	75.2
Physics	1	100	96.7	0	44.6	60	81.7
Psychology	2	100	N/A	0	N/A	80	N/A
Sociology	3	100	98.3	33	44.3	60	83.6
Textiles	3	100	N/A	0	N/A	60	N/A
Travel & Tourism	1	100	90	0	19.5	60	62.2

### Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	2	100	80.1	0	23.7	35	29.9
Biology	2	0	65.2	0	11.1	0	20.6
Business Studies	1	100	76.4	0	16.3	30	26.2
Drama	3	100	86.5	0	19.6	20	30.6
English Lit	2	100	85.9	0	19.1	25	30.2
Gen Studies	8	12.5	73.9	0	17.8	2.5	25.7
Geography	1	0	74.3	0	19.8	0	26.5
ICT	8	50	67	0	10.9	11.3	21.4
Maths	4	50	61.9	0	17.1	12.5	22.1
Physics	5	20	68.6	0	14.4	4	22.7
Sociology	3	0	71.8	0	18.4	0	25.4
PE	2	0	73.2	0	11.4	0	23.1
Electronics	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	20	N/A
Psychology	2	50	N/A	0	N/A	10	N/A
Design Tech	3	100	74.9	33	15.1	16.7	25.3

### Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure & Tourism	12	100	N/A	75	N/A	N/A	N/A

ICT	19	79	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Health & Social	4	75	N/A	25	N/A	N/A	N/A

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS.

### ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on **English literature**, and **French**. Spanish was sampled. There are no students studying Spanish in Year 13. One good lesson and one excellent lesson were seen, in which three students with English as an additional language gave excellent presentations in Spanish. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Standards are above average and achievement is very good.

#### Example of outstanding practice

**The Technology College status of the school contributed significantly to students' excellent achievement in a Year 12 Spanish lesson.**

Three students whose respective home languages are French, Urdu and German, each used their very good knowledge of ICT to deliver imaginative Power Point presentations using an Interactive whiteboard, accompanied by their own commentary in Spanish. The students had used independent study effectively to research Spanish Internet websites on one of three cities - Madrid, Bilbao and Barcelona. Reading and understanding challenging authentic texts helped to prepare them very well for the reading and essay component of the AS examination. The visual impact of each student's presentation was excellent. Confidently using school laptop computers, all three students used a combination of static and moving text, with colourful photographs, and each page was well timed to change at appropriate stages of the presentations. Their choice of architecture, parks and traditions of the very different Spanish cities showed their appreciation of the Hispanic culture. The students spoke confidently and fluently, with very good Spanish accents, and little reference to notes. The teacher's own fluent use of Spanish set high standards for the students; this was evident in their ready responses to the teachers' unexpected questions, on, for example, the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. This lesson prepared the students well for the future. Their careful listening to each other developed social skills well, and the presentations helped them prepare for communicating confidently and professionally in the workplace.

### English Literature

Provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching enables students to make the progress expected of them.
- Students work hard and enjoy lessons.
- Good leadership is helping to improve teaching and learning.
- Though results are improving, few students achieved A or B grades in recent GCE A-level examinations.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

### Commentary

174. Students enter the sixth form with well below average standards of attainment. Results in the 2003 A-Level GCE examinations were well below the national average. The proportion of students gaining either A or B grades in the A2-level examination was low. Work seen during

the inspection was below average but better than indicated in recent examination results. A number of students in the current Year 13 are predicted to achieve A grades. Comparing A-level results with GCSE grades, when they entered the sixth form, shows that students generally achieve the grades expected of them.

175. Students work very well in lessons. They are involved in the frequent group activities and enjoy the texts they study. They organize notes in folders well. Teachers encourage students to develop their speaking skills in lessons but most remain reluctant to make longer contributions. Few students show evidence of wider reading, for example, to gain knowledge of important critical views. In the work of all but the highest attaining students, spelling is often a weakness and written expression lacks fluency. Higher attaining students demonstrate good detailed analysis of William Blake's poems. All students have good knowledge of background detail and quotations for Aphra Behn's play, 'The Rover', but essays often fail to develop a clear line of argument beneath the detail. English literature is a popular choice for A-level study. For a few students, frequent absence from lessons affects the examination grades they achieve. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall because they start from well below average attainment and good teaching helps them to make the progress expected of them and overcome weak basic skills.
176. Teachers plan their lessons carefully so that all students are fully involved in group discussions and presentations to the class. As a result students make good progress in lessons and enjoy learning. Teachers are very confident in their subject. They know their students well and push them to achieve their best. Teachers offer additional support to students who meet with difficulties. Marking is detailed and often suggests ways for students to improve written work. Teachers provide useful background materials to support students' study of texts but suggestions for critical reading are limited. Students know the levels at which they are working and have clear targets for achievement in examinations. They have occasional theatre visits.
177. Good leadership helps all teachers to provide a coherent and stimulating course with wide appeal to students. Teaching is shared so that students benefit from different approaches to study. Examination requirements are clearly explained. Standards of work are similar to those outlined in the previous inspection. Teaching has improved.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

178. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are below average. However, students have sufficient skills in language to cope with all subjects. They are able to talk to teachers and other students in lessons so as to make their meaning clear. They understand what they read and can write with reasonable accuracy for a variety of tasks. However, spelling and punctuation are often below average. In biology, students lack confidence in oral work and have a limited range of vocabulary. Opportunities for writing are limited. Students' spelling and sentence structuring in ICT folder work are weak. In art and design, there is little focus on language, although students' mock interviews for college help to develop speaking skills. In GNVQ travel and tourism, students use individual whiteboards for language work and show good word-processing skills. Good emphasis on students' speaking and listening is also found in modern foreign languages and design and technology. In history, teachers show students how to structure their written work and classroom displays emphasise aspects of literacy. Teachers in design and technology and modern foreign languages encourage students to make appropriate use of the Internet. Only a small number of students make regular use of the school library, which is small and has limited resources for supporting sixth form study.

### **French**

Overall provision is **satisfactory**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do not make sufficient progress in speaking.
- Lack of personal text books substantially limits all students' progress.
- Students' achievement in reading is good.
- Teachers support students' learning well with good quality resources.
- The leadership role of the department is not clearly defined.
- Standards are improving in Year 12.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Average
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Unsatisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

## Commentary

179. In 2003 at A-level, two students achieved pass grades. At AS-level all students were successful in gaining at least a pass and their achievement was satisfactory. Over the past few years, the number of students studying French has fluctuated, with fewer boys than girls. Indications are that, currently in Years 12 and 13, students' achievement is satisfactory and they are working well towards their predicted grades. Retention of students on courses is satisfactory.
180. Students in both years achieve well in reading; for example, they successfully use ICT to research French websites on the Internet for coursework assignments on tourism in France. They make good progress in listening because teachers use their fluent French consistently in lessons; for example, in a Year 13 lesson, students showed good understanding of an authentic French broadcast about asylum seekers. By contrast, standards in speaking are below average in both years and some students have very poor French accents. This is because they have too few opportunities to develop self-expression through, for example, extending their responses during class discussion, or improving fluency in regular practice with fluent speakers. In writing, standards are average overall. Year 13 students are dependent on support with vocabulary, accuracy of verb tenses and agreements; Year 12 students have made very good progress in forming extended sentences to describe travel experiences. Although the dedicated teachers produce motivating language resources, the lack of textbooks severely limits all students' progress, and restricts opportunities for independent learning.
181. In all the lessons, students showed good attitudes to learning, but the pace of teaching was sometimes slow. Teachers mark assignments thoroughly but do not routinely link grades to examination criteria, and, consequently, students are not fully aware of their progress.
182. The teachers who have responsibility for the teaching of the A-level and AS-level French courses show strong commitment to their students' success. Standards are rising in Year 12. Data is used very well to set medium and long-term targets. However, the leadership role is not clear, and schemes of work require revision. Improvement since the last report is satisfactory overall. Speaking skills are still weak, and students' achievement remains the same as in the last report. The number of students choosing French is increasing.

## MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and biology. One lesson was sampled in each of physics, chemistry and AS level science. In **physics**, teaching is good, explanations of vectors are clear and the lesson contained a variety of demanding activities that kept students attention. Achievement is good and mathematical skills improve. In **chemistry**, teaching is very good, Relationships and planning are very good and lead to very demanding teaching in lessons which ensures very good achievement. Students' achievements are good. Relationships, overall, are very good and as a result students' confidence and willingness to try, are very good. In AS level **science** pupils are achieving well because good teaching of science and key skills helps students to learn. Good questioning keeps lessons moving and there is plenty of opportunity for students to take responsibility for their learning. Students benefit from good guidance from their teachers.

### Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

The school offers courses leading to mathematics at AS level and A2 level. Students study a combination of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. In response to student requests, there is provision for a re-sit GCSE course timetabled for three lessons per week. Attendance is not good in part, at least, because of timetable clashes.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress because of the good teaching they receive.
- Most students, including those with relatively weak GCSE grades as a starting point, are set to complete the courses successfully.
- The students are positive about their studies and the provision made for them.
- Recruitment and retention rates have been poor in recent years.
- Insufficient use is being made of short-term timed tests to hone students' knowledge and improve their ability to answer under pressure.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

### Commentary

183. The number of students taking mathematics in most years since 2000 has been too low to make a reliable comparison of their results with national figures. Numbers of students taking advanced level mathematics have been low and examination success limited. The department has taken, and is taking, positive steps to remedy this position so that currently there are ten students in Year 12. There are also over twenty Year 11 students who have expressed an interest in studying mathematics at advanced level next year. This improvement stems from better curriculum organisation with all pupils in the top set in Year 11 being entered for the higher tier at GCSE having already secured, in the majority of cases, a higher grade in GCSE statistics.

184. In the upper sixth, there is one student. She is achieving well and is on course for a middle grade at A2 level. She entered the sixth form with a grade B on the intermediate GCSE paper

and benefited from departmental policy of requiring students to do extra catch-up work during the summer holidays and in their own time. The departmentally produced revision booklets and materials have proved very useful too. This has resulted in very marked improvement in algebraic skills and manipulation. Now, for example, she handles partial fractions with confidence.

185. In Year 12, the entry level to the course is lower than is the case in many schools. Almost half of the students begin from a background of GCSE mathematics at intermediate rather than higher level. Most of these are on course for a pass at AS level in the summer because of the good support arrangements referred to above. Their good achievement is also dependent on how much effort the students are prepared to make. Most are working effectively, devoting five or more hours weekly to private study in addition to taught time in lessons. One or two, however, are not doing enough homework and have incomplete sets of notes. The teachers have taken positive action about this and these students are being made to catch up. Students with an intermediate level GCSE showed weakness in basic algebraic manipulation initially but are beginning to improve. All can use basic calculus in solving straightforward problems but lower attaining students find it difficult to see when it should be used in different contexts, such as finding the smallest amount of metal needed to make a tin box.
186. Teaching is good. The teachers are enthusiastic and keen on their subject. Lessons are well prepared and presented providing the right level of pace and challenge for students of all abilities so that most are achieving well and all are learning at least as well as they should. The teachers are experienced and well qualified. There is often good and perceptive use of question and answer techniques but in other respects, the tendency is for the dominant mode of delivery being teacher rather than student centred so that some lessons can be relatively unexciting.
187. Marking is variable, dependent upon the teacher. There is some detailed marking and correction of work but, in some cases, almost all work, other than tests, is gone through in class with students checking their own work. This is a sound and sensible way of doing things for some of the work, but is not good enough if used without checking what the students are doing closely to keep them up to the mark and doing spot-marking as well.
188. There are testing procedures in place and mock examinations provide some examination practise so the position with regard to the use of assessment is satisfactory. There is, however, room for improvement. Not enough use is being made of short-term tests using exam standard questions marked to examination levels. These help students see what they can do under examination conditions at an early stage. Currently the students have gained the impression that they understand work better than they actually do, because they can produce solutions when not time-constrained or having to deal with a variety of problems at once.
189. The students are enjoying their mathematics with most relishing the mental stimulation and challenge that it provides. Several hope to continue their studies at university. The student in the upper sixth has already secured a place for next year. All spoke highly of their teachers and are appreciative of the fact that that they are friendly, helpful and approachable. They are, therefore, gaining in understanding because they are confident that they will not be made to feel inferior if there are areas they find difficult.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

190. Standards in mathematics are broadly average. They are sufficient for the students to be able to cope because teachers in the various subject areas compensate by covering ground which the students have not previously mastered well enough. In physical education, the students use fractions and percentages effectively. In art and design, they show good spatial awareness. All students studying advanced and advanced vocational subjects follow a general studies course. Part of this involves entry to an examination in use of number and data analysis for some 80 students in Year 12, and 40 in Year 13. The students find this useful in

improving their mathematical skills. The qualification also provides a useful addendum to their portfolio when applying to university.

## Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

### Main Strengths and weaknesses

- Records of marks are good and are used well to support students.
- Relationships in lessons are very good; students are encouraged and become more confident.
- Teachers make good use of ICT to make lessons interesting.
- Some teaching is unsatisfactory and leads to unsatisfactory learning.
- Students are not provided with enough opportunities to write evaluative or extended accounts in their own words. This does not prepare them well for examinations.
- A significant number of students do not complete the course.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Well below average
Teaching	Satisfactory
Learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory

### Commentary

191. In the past, too few candidates have taken A-level examinations in biology for legitimate comparisons with national averages to be made. However, most gained low grades. In lessons standards vary, a minority of students have an understanding of biology that is appropriate to higher grades but the work of the majority is at the lower grades and a small number at a fail grade. Taking into account their well below average standards at the start of the course, students' achievement is satisfactory. Students' analytical skills are weak.
192. Students' learning was good when tasks were interesting and suitably demanding, for example when presenting information about smoking or heart disease. Where teaching is undemanding, it is not varied and does not offer students opportunities to take responsibility for their work. Work about the kidney and about lung disease statistics was not used to teach students how to interpret and evaluate information, so that their analytical skills did not improve. Their understanding of ultra-filtration in the kidney was well below average.
193. Good teaching and learning happens when skilful use of an interactive whiteboard generates interest and makes good use of time or when questions about respiration are demanding and improve students' understanding of difficult ideas about release of energy from food. Explanations are clear and these lessons are well planned. Relationships are very good, students are regularly encouraged and, although many are still hesitant, their confidence is improving. Unsatisfactory teaching is undemanding and too much of the lesson is led by the teacher. Students work slowly at unvaried tasks that do not improve understanding. Records of work show that evaluative work about photosynthesis is provided but opportunities to interpret graphs, data or written accounts are infrequent. Teaching about enzymes is thorough and makes good use of information sheets. Examination questions are used for revision and are thoroughly marked, however, they show that some students are at risk of failure. Analytical and

explanatory writing is not done often and improving students' writing skills does not have a high priority, this will limit performance in examinations.

194. New teaching plans have been written and changes in the leadership of the department are bringing other improvements. Most lessons take place in laboratories, recruitment is improving quickly and the entry requirement for the course has been raised. A bridging course is used to introduce students to the sixth form course and very thorough records of marks are used to support students well. However, some students' work is poorly organised and of little use for revision. Teachers have not received training to prepare them for new A-level courses and monitoring of teaching is not regular. Data are not used by students during their lessons, although other ICT equipment is used frequently.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on information and communication technology. Eight students in Year 13 are completing an A-level in information technology. A large part of this course is business education. Year 12 students were able to choose new ICT courses; 19 chose a GNVQ intermediate and 33 an AVCE. Lessons in all three courses were seen during the inspection.

### Information and communication technology

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- New courses in Year 12 meet the needs of students better.
- Overall leadership and management are good.
- Students' attitudes are very good.
- Entry requirements for AVCE are too low.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Below average
Teaching	Good
Learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Not applicable

### Commentary

195. Entries to A-level examinations in 2002 and 2003 were too small for any statistical analysis to be possible.
196. Standards of work at A-level now are well below average and reflect overall low AS standards at the end of Year 12. Students are attentive but do not retain concepts well and have to be prompted to make responses. However, attainment on entry to the course is also well below average and good management and teaching have helped students achieve satisfactorily overall. Good textbooks, plenty of structure to the course and appropriate study support help students to learn satisfactorily. Recent newsworthy case studies of the use, or ineffective use, of ICT, for example in the work of the London ambulance service, enliven learning. Very good understanding by the teacher of course requirements and a very well organised work file with appropriate support sheets for students, ensure examination requirements are met. One database project indicated a good student link with a local company and was well presented.



A-level examination targets for students are set but not clearly understood or acted upon within the department.

197. New courses in Year 12 are a better ICT curriculum than A-level for students taking them. They contain more practical ICT, applicable to more careers and they follow on better from Year 11 work, particularly the AVCE course. However, the school's policy of allowing almost any student to follow a GNVQ at age 16 with the AVCE in the sixth form, means a significant number of students on this course have weak numeracy and literacy skills and are generally of well below average attainment. This contrasts with a smaller number of students with above average attainment. Consequently, AVCE groups have a particularly wide range of ability in them with attendant difficulties for teaching and learning. Students taking the GNVQ intermediate course are, overall, of lower prior attainment than those taking AVCE; a significant number of students have identified learning difficulties. Good teaching is, again, coping with the range of capabilities in class and all students seen were fully occupied in their work, which they enjoy.
198. Standards of work in the GNVQ Intermediate course are broadly average for that level of course and achievement is satisfactory. Moderators' assessments indicate both pass and merit grades with a clear distinction between the two; presentation and the depth of evaluation and description is better in the merit work and spreadsheets and associated graphing more complex. There is a range of standards within each category and some pass grade work is particularly weak at demonstrating understanding of the work in hand; students can meet tick-box criteria about presenting graph types for example, but not necessarily know what they mean. Too much work also contains spelling and typographical errors. Students in the AVCE course can use the Internet appropriately for research but the filter systems used to prevent access to undesirable sites also hinder that research. For example, during the inspection, a search for information about local charities, for some bizarre reason, was blocked; consequently students' progress was hindered. Standards on this course appear below average overall, but this is a new course and evidence seen was limited.
199. A good lesson illustrated the teacher's very good knowledge of AVCE requirements and her clear articulation of these left students with a good understanding of what they had to do. However, just as in the A level group, students were slow to make responses to questions. They have experience of group work but not of presenting their work to others; doing so might encourage confidence in dealing with people.
200. Leadership and management of ICT overall are good. A large department of appropriately skilled teachers supports rapidly increasing numbers of students in new, better, courses. The use of assessment data is not yet embedded in lessons and is, consequently, unsatisfactory. However, support for students to improve their work is done well through tutorial sessions. If teachers annotated students' draft work held on computers, it would provide a means of recording the quality of such intervention by teachers so assessment could be monitored; few, if any, comments appear on students' finished module work. Post 16 ICT was not commented on in the last report. Improvement in curriculum provision over the last year has been very good. Insufficient consideration to initial academic standards which best fit entry to AVCE will likely depress overall standards attained in it.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

201. Students are capable in the use of ICT and they use it appropriately for presentation and research across most subjects. Some teachers make good use of projectors and whiteboards to enhance lessons. An excellent example of the use of ICT by students to present their work was seen in a Year 12 Spanish lesson. A lack of equipment in biology restricts the use of data-loggers.

## **HUMANITIES**

The focus of the inspection was on history. One Year 12 lesson in **psychology** was sampled. Students were engaged by the subject matter by the end of the lesson after a slow start but not enough was demanded of the students early on in the lesson. Teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory and standards in relation to course expectations were below average.

## History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average because many students do not have the necessary background knowledge to take full benefit of what the subject has to offer.
- Teaching is good and leads to students achieving well in both years.
- Teachers know their subject well and provide their students with thought-provoking resources.
- Although the subject is becoming increasingly popular, many students do not continue their studies into Year 13.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Good
Standards of work seen	Below average
Quality of teaching	Good
Quality of learning	Good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

## Commentary

202. There have been no entries for A-level examinations for four years but numbers opting for advanced study in Year 12 have increased markedly of late, however, a lower than average number of students have the highest GCSE grades. Students achieve well in their search for the truth but, because many find the work difficult, few choose to continue their studies into Year 13. Nonetheless, when they are challenged to think deeply about the subject-matter and when they are required to explore historical issues in pairs and in groups, most can use the views of a range of historians to come to reasoned conclusions about the topics under discussion. Students of good ability in Year 13, for example, give a balanced view on the effectiveness of Sir Edward Grey as foreign minister, and those in Year 12 take part in spontaneous debate about Hitler's first attempt to seize power in 1923. For many students, however, the work is rather complex and they find it difficult to justify their views at any length.
203. Teachers have a good command of their subject and produce resources, which encourage their students to see the past in shades of grey rather than black and white. In most lessons, teachers ask challenging questions and foster historical debate. Moreover, they work hard to inspire their students with a variety of historical anecdotes. Furthermore, they are concerned to include everyone in what the subject has to offer and spend considerable time visiting individuals to check on their progress and to challenge them further. Teaching is good overall, but in a minority of lessons it lacks pace and students are not fully engaged by the approach.
204. Because of inspiring leadership, high-quality display in classrooms and a range of motivational teaching methods lower down the school, youngsters are opting for sixth-form study in increasing numbers. The department is, therefore, well placed for further development and future success.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE

The focus was on design and technology, product design – graphics, and product design - textiles.

### Product design - Graphics

Provision in product design - graphics is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attitudes are good overall and a few have excellent attitudes, high aspirations and a 'feeling' for design.
- Though standards remain below average overall, students who attend and keep up to date with work, tend to achieve satisfactorily.
- The curriculum is unsatisfactory
- Attendance is erratic.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Satisfactory
Standards of work seen	Below average
Teaching	Satisfactory
Learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	No judgement possible
Management	Unsatisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	Not applicable

#### Commentary

205. The inspection was carried out in the absence of the lead teacher of this course due to ill health.
206. Standards of attainment of students when they start the course are overall well below average. This is due to the relatively low GCSE standards necessary to allow access to the sixth form. Neither is a GCSE in a related subject, for example graphic products or resistant materials, necessarily required for access to this A-level course.
207. In 2003, six students were entered for A-level, five passed but standards were well below average. Their achievement, whether they did as well as was likely, was broadly satisfactory. AS examination results at the end of Year12 indicate a split between satisfactory and unsatisfactory achievement. Those students with weak results are repeating AS-level examinations.
208. Twelve students take the course in Year 12. Attendance is erratic; six students were present in one lesson, nine in another. Teachers were unclear about numbers in the group. Only one student has left since induction in September so retention is good. Aside from attendance, students' attitudes are good overall. A few students have exceptional attitudes to work, have a clear interest in their futures and a desire to design. Leadership of the course has obviously contributed to student retention and attitudes and this aspect of leadership are good.
209. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are variable and range between above average and well below average; standards are below average overall. Achievement overall is just satisfactory, though there are adverse effects of irregular attendance. Undoubtedly, some students do not benefit as much as they could from more consistent guidance and assessment. Females make more consistent effort and their folios of work are often of a better standard than those of males. There are exceptions but females' GCSE results in related subjects tend to be higher and AS-level results in 2003 were markedly better for females than males.

210. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students are proficient at using the design software provided for them and learning of ICT techniques has been good. Most Year 12 students seen during the inspection can set out design sheets and ideas 'boards' and can talk intelligently about their ideas. They have done useful research using books and the Internet and are keen to listen to ideas for further research and development. A few have above average drawing and rendering skills, which are supported by work they also do in art and design. However, not all students set out a simple flowchart quickly and neatly and some cannot spell appropriate words such as 'specification' and 'motivation'. An able student can do these things and engage in a useful conversation about drawing conventions.
211. In Year 13, students appear to prefer the practical elements of their work. This is not surprising, as a theory lesson about designing robots, an exam unit chosen by the school, had no appropriate resources. Scrutiny of work and discussion with students reveal that learning of the design process and design techniques is just satisfactory. Work on a variety of projects, for example, a shower radio and a retro designed hi-fi system is interesting and research progressing. However, few students have visited museums with design related areas, handled objects described as classic designs, or been encouraged to visit manufacturing centres or experiment with materials, for example, glass, themselves. These omissions to the curriculum, coupled with a 'dry' theory section make the curriculum unsatisfactory.
212. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. This takes into account the adverse effects of the absence of the principal teacher, staff illness, and students out of lessons taking examinations. Students are not involved enough in debate and talking through ideas. Not every opportunity for practical work and appropriate use of school-based and external resources was taken. Insufficient evidence was available by which to judge assessment. Students do have close support from their principal teacher about their ideas but males, in particular, appear to have a tendency not to complete work or work erratically; incomplete work led to low AS grades. Rigorous assessment should help tackle this problem and provide more focused support to all students, including the most able and hardest working who need better guidance on how to excel.
213. There is insufficient evidence on which to judge leadership overall. Management is unsatisfactory because information about students is not used effectively by all teachers, or is unavailable to them; the curriculum does not cater for all students' specific needs well enough.

## Product design - Textiles

Provision in product design - textiles is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are creative and their work displays a unique identity.
- Good teaching from subject specialists with varying subject expertise enables students to achieve well.
- Visits from school have helped to widen students' perceptions of design potential.
- Good links with art in school have a positive effect on creativity.
- Design decisions are not always very well communicated in coursework folios.
- Student discussions are limited to some extent by small group size.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Good
Standards of work seen	Average
Teaching	Good

Learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Improvement	Not reported

## Commentary

214. The department offers textiles at both AS and A2 level. The examination board has changed for the current Year 12 to provide a syllabus better suited to their needs. In 2003, all three students who entered A-level passed with D grades. This represents appropriate achievement based on their previous attainment. Results for AS Level again show most students achieved in line with predictions based on prior attainment. Students are accepted on to the course with appropriate GCSE grades. One or two students are accepted on to the course from a background in art rather than textiles, which means they do not have textile skills initially. Very few students fail to complete the course.
215. Students are creative and generate highly original ideas for their products. They make good use of drawing and sketching skills together with a good colour awareness acquired in art to present their ideas. The generation of ideas is stimulated by good initial research, including outside visits and by observing exemplar material. Able students can communicate effectively in their coursework design development and how problems have been overcome. They annotate their drawings fully and understand when it is appropriate to carry out further research. Evaluation is detailed and ongoing. One student, engaged in an ambitious project to produce an Ascot hat, has secured a place for herself working with an expert outside of school hours. Middle-ability students are achieving as expected. Those students with little experience of textiles in Year 12 are currently producing work akin to high grade GCSE standard but are rapidly making up ground due to good teaching. Students are good at experimenting with materials and techniques to produce a desired effect in their finished product. Students use ICT well including CAD/CAM to help them when designing and making.
216. Teaching is good and students benefit from teachers with wide-ranging experience between them. The work is well planned to provide a good balance between designing and making. Very good relationships exist and because groups tend to be small in number, students receive a lot of individual attention. The downside of this is that discussion work can be limited because there are not many people to spark ideas off. Students are good independent learners and say that they appreciate the fact that the department is open to them throughout the day and they can always get help when necessary. This has a positive effect on motivation and on standards. All the students hold very positive views of the subject which they enjoy. Students' work is marked to examination board criteria and students receive good verbal and written feedback so that they know how to improve. Students act on the advice of their teachers.
217. The subject is taught in very good accommodation, which has been upgraded as a result of the Technology College bid. Although the subject is generally well resourced, students work under difficulty when pattern drafting because the school cannot provide the correct paper. The teacher was unable to show any examples of modern technology called 'smart materials' manufactured to fulfil a particular purpose when students were learning about this topic.
218. There is a new subject co-ordinator in post for textiles. Leadership and management are good. The subject is rapidly expanding and standards are improving due to monitoring and evaluation.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on **fine art**. Advanced level theatre studies and GCSE expressive arts were sampled.

219. Two lessons of **theatre studies** were seen. Lessons were lively and productive. All students were thoroughly involved and learning well in response to good teaching. There were good opportunities for independent work. Teachers prepare students thoroughly for tasks and students' positive attitudes assist learning.
220. In a good GCSE **expressive arts** lesson on 'Masks' there was plenty of positive input from the students who demonstrated good skills and clear gains in knowledge.

## Art and design

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching team motivates students to achieve very well.
- Standards are improving.
- Students are developing very well as independent learners.
- Skills in drawing and painting are very good.
- Skills in speaking and writing about art are insufficiently developed.
- Students do not use computers to create art.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Very good
Standards of work seen	Above average
Quality of teaching	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the last inspection	Not applicable

### Commentary

221. Until recently, only a small number of students was entered for examinations and the proportion of students achieving the higher grades was below average. Now a significant number of students, mainly female, study art and the standard of current work indicates that future results will be more in line with national expectations at this level. Students arrive with a well-established skills base and make rapid progress in acquiring new skills and knowledge which they apply with imagination. They are blossoming as independent artists and many are achieving standards that would not be out of place at an even higher level. The smaller number of male students are also achieving very well. Colour is understood and exploited extremely well by studying artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe. Strong, expressive, figurative work is aided by life drawing sessions in a local college. Students are exposed to the best quality art by visiting national art galleries and this is promoting a greater awareness of different art movements. The drawing of neo-classical sculpture in the city art gallery is developing a subtler understanding and appreciation of aesthetic values. Understanding of contemporary art practice is limited by the infrequent opportunities to work with visiting artists-in-residence. Students are beginning to express personal opinions and judgements in their writing but the majority are not confident when talking about their art. They are able to use computers to research art and to present their written work, but do not yet have the studio computer resources available to prepare them for creative higher education art and design courses.
222. There is a well led, very strong, teaching team with a wide range of expertise in use which is resulting in very good learning. Teachers work hard and regular practical demonstrations by teachers are instrumental in furthering students' practical skills. Teachers show students how to build up clay correctly when modelling three-dimensional portraits and this results in well-

made sculptures. Individual care and attention is a regular feature of all lessons. Each student is regularly involved in a detailed self-assessment and a teacher assessment recording process, with the result that students know exactly what they have to do to improve. Students are clearly interested in their work and lessons are well attended. Students in both years speak very positively about the way they are treated as adult learners, the greater individual responsibility that is demanded of them and the breadth of new opportunities provided.

223. This is a very good department. There is very clear leadership with the vision to achieve excellence. There has been a significant growth in the number of students choosing art and standards have risen. Planning for the new building addresses a previous outstanding issue by including the essential study space for students to be able to continue their practical work out of lesson time.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on **physical education** and **travel and tourism**.

### Physical education

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to very good learning.
- Students' very good commitment to study ensures very good achievement.
- The very good advice and guidance students receive prepares them well for the demands of the course.
- Excellent leadership of the subject gives a definite vision for improvement.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement.	Very good
Standards of work seen	Above average
Quality of teaching	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the last inspection	Not applicable

### Commentary

224. In 2003, results at AS-level and A-level were below average at the higher grades, but above the national average for the subject overall. These students started their advanced course with well below average prior attainment. Students did better in this subject than they did in the other subjects they took.

225. The standard of work seen, both in students' files, and especially in lessons, in both Year 12 (AS-level) and Year 13 (A-level), is of a high quality. This is noteworthy when taking into consideration the standards reached by these same students at GCSE level before setting out on this course of study. They are demonstrating very good achievement over time. Regularly, 100 per cent of students who start out on advanced courses of study in physical education complete them successfully. They are very clear about the difficulties they will face, and the advantages they will gain by following these courses. Most students go on to higher education.

226. Teaching is consistently very good, and this leads directly to very good learning. Committed and expert teachers expect the best of the students, who respond to inspiring teaching with enjoyment and a very focused determination to succeed.

**Example of excellent practice**

**A year 12 physiology lesson**

Very challenging teaching of the highest quality inspired the whole group to gain a very clear understanding of the different parts of the heart. The teacher challenged students to dissect pigs' hearts individually and then in groups to recognise and identify the component arteries, veins, valves and ventricles. When added to diagrams, jigsaws, discussions and demonstrations, the students very quickly learned the structure of the heart, and their learning was tested in a spirited question and answer session to conclude the lesson.

227. The best lessons are characterised by very detailed planning of teaching and the mature attitude the students bring to their studies, though some are a little reticent at times. Both teachers and students are clearly committed to the subject. All students voluntarily undertake the community sports leader award under the guidance of their teachers. They work with younger children in their own time, using their high level sporting skills and knowledge to raise standards and to raise awareness of the benefits of participation in regular exercise.

228. Excellent leadership has ensured that a vision of continuous improvement is held. A constant striving to do better underpins all the work of the department. Very good management, focused completely on learning, ensures that everything runs smoothly and successfully. Teachers are encouraged to try out new ideas, and to record their self-evaluations.

**Travel and tourism**

Provision in travel and tourism is **very good**.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average and achievement is very good.
- Students work enthusiastically in a subject they see as relevant, and their attitudes are excellent.
- Teaching is very good and uses visits and work placements to give students practical experience of the tourist industry.

Aspect	Overall judgement
Achievement	Very good
Standards of work seen	Above average
Quality of teaching	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the last inspection	Not applicable



## Commentary

229. Five lessons were observed and student portfolios examined. This showed standards to be above average in this level 3 AVCE course that will be examined for the first time in summer, 2004. When the entry level of students is taken into account, this represents very good achievement.
230. Students use a variety of analytical techniques to compare the level of customer services at contrasting centres such as Alton Towers and the Trafford Centre. They understand and explain the impact of cultural tourism on local attractions, such as Speke Hall and the Albert Docks complex. Year 12 students are enthusiastically preparing for a fieldwork visit to New York to assess the importance of the international tourist industry. As a result, they are able to discuss knowledgeably the reasons for the expansion of overseas travel and the impact this has on local economies.
231. Teaching in the subject is very good and is characterised by thorough preparation, varied teaching styles and a strong emphasis on practical tasks, including work placement and visits. Students respond very well and see the subject as relevant and interesting. ICT is well used by students to compile their portfolios and to research for information on the Internet.
232. Leadership of the subject is very good and responsibilities are clearly understood by all members of the teaching staff. A key feature is the induction and encouragement of new staff in this rapidly expanding department. Management is very good with a very efficient database in place for student tracking, that both uses target grades and makes students aware of how they can improve their work.
233. The attitude of students towards the subject is excellent and, not surprisingly, this is now one of the most popular post-16 subjects on offer in the school.

## BUSINESS

No subject was a focus of the inspection. **Business Studies** was sampled.

234. One Year 13 lesson was seen. In this lesson, teaching and learning were good and students made good progress in furthering their understanding of how businesses grow. Learning was supported by very good attitudes. Standards were below average.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subject was the focus of the inspection.

235. One lesson was sampled in Year 12 on a GNVQ intermediate course. Teaching and learning were very good. Students made very good progress in learning about predictable and unpredictable events in life. They were subsequently able to apply this knowledge in a consideration of several case studies provided by the teacher. Standards in this lesson were average representing very good achievement. Currently these students are on target to achieve their predicted grade or higher, based on prior attainment. A student identified as having special educational needs is achieving higher than expected because the course is well matched to her needs. Students have positive views of the subject and believe it provides a good link to their future career aspirations. The school also offers AVCE in this subject for the first time this year, but this was not sampled.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

All students follow a course in personal social and health education and those taking Advanced level courses take a general studies course.

236. Two lessons of **general studies** were sampled, where ethical issues and conflict resolution were tackled. Good teaching built up students' knowledge and understanding well and there was a good contribution to students' personal development and knowledge and understanding of elements of religious education. Standards in relation expectations in general studies were below average, but students were achieving well in relation to their prior standards.
237. Two lesson of **personal, social and health education** were sampled. These lessons are usually well attended and students appreciate them. Students learnt about the benefits and drawbacks of moving into higher education in Year 12, and student loans were explained and discussed in Year 13. In Year 12, good teaching made many demands of students to research independently on computers under time restrictions. This resulted in good learning and much encouragement of independent work

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

