

INSPECTION REPORT

MALBANK SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Nantwich

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111419

Headteacher: Mr A Kettleday

Lead inspector: Mr D Morton

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 26th March 2004

Inspection number: 259260

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1362
School address:	Welsh Row Nantwich Cheshire
Postcode:	CW5 5HD
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Professor G Doherty
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Malbank School and Sixth Form College is larger than most secondary schools and has 1362 students on roll. It is a mixed comprehensive school with students aged 11 to 19. It is situated close to the centre of Nantwich, Cheshire, and receives students from a number of primary schools, some from as far away as Crewe. Students are mainly from white British backgrounds, although three per cent of students come from a small number of minority ethnic groupings. The percentage of students with a mother tongue other than English is low and believed to be around 1.3 per cent. Of these, none is at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of students who join or leave the school at other than the usual times, 5.9 per cent, is average. The percentage of students who take free school meals, 6.3 per cent, is below the national average. The social background of students is better, overall, than that found nationally. The percentage of students with special educational needs, 4.3 per cent, is well below the national average and those with Statements of Special Education Need, 0.6 per cent, is below the national average. Attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is above average overall.

The sixth form is larger than most with 294 students on roll and it has grown steadily over the last six years. There are more females than males at a ratio of three to two. Just over a half of Year 11 students move into the sixth form and a third of students come from local schools or further afield. Students are admitted on interview and entry is almost open access although students are usually expected to have a minimum of four GCSE passes at grade C or above. The curriculum consists of a very wide range of traditional and vocational subjects. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average overall. Virtually all students successfully complete their courses and most move on to universities.

The school has specialist school status as an arts college	2002
Also awarded:	
Sportsmark	2000
Investor in Careers	2000
Artsmark Gold in 2000 and renewed	2003
Healthy Schools	2003
Investor in people	2003

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
13154	D Morton	Lead inspector	Drama (11-16) Media studies (Sixth form) Theatre studies (Sixth form)
19374	W Sheehan	Lay inspector	
23926	D Howorth	Sixth form co-ordinator	Health and social care (Sixth form)
32208	D Aitken	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (11-16) German (Sixth form) Provision for students with English as an additional language
30512	M Bailey	Team inspector	Science (11-16) Physics (Sixth form)
12825	N Carr	Team inspector	History (11-16) Psychology (Sixth form)
21971	J Glennon	Team inspector	English
27665	A Lees	Team inspector	Music (11-16)
20192	T McDermott	Team inspector	Citizenship (11-16) Physical education
32340	P McKay	Team inspector	Geography (11-16)
39030	R Pitcher	Team inspector	Religious education (11-16) Provision for students with special educational needs
17923	M Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32329	A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
13189	P Walton	Team inspector	Design and technology (11-16)
8341	B Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics

The inspection contractor was:

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	11
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	19
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	29
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	33
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	74

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Malbank School and Sixth Form College is a good school with several very good and some outstanding features. It puts into practice its commitment that 'every child counts'. Teaching, learning and achievement are good. Leadership, especially of the headteacher, is very good. The school gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching, learning and achievement are very good in Years 10 and 11 and sometimes outstanding in health and social care, information and communication technology (ICT) and theatre studies in the sixth form. Less successful subjects are geography and modern foreign languages; provision for religious education is unsatisfactory.
- GCSE results are well above average.
- The school provides an innovative curriculum with a very good range of enrichment activities.
- Support for less successful teaching, and the spreading of good practice, especially in Years 7 to 9, are not sufficiently systematic.
- Students' attitudes to their work and their relationships with each other and staff are very good, especially in lessons.
- Management of the site at breaks and lunchtimes does not ensure that all students behave in an acceptable manner.

Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards are higher, teaching is better and the school has been awarded specialist college status for the arts; these features are significant to the success of the school. Key concerns noted at the time of the previous inspection in 1998 have been overcome, apart from the provision for religious education and a daily act of collective worship for all students.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	A	B	A	A
Performance in GCE AS and A-level examinations in Years 12 and 13	A	B	B	

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

The achievement of students is good.

- Results in 2003 were well above average in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE results at the end of Year 11. Results in Year 13 A-level examinations were above average in 2003.
- Results in national tests in Year 9 were an improvement on those of the previous year and part of an improving trend that was above that found nationally. Overall results compared with similar schools were also well above average; those in English and mathematics were above average.
- Overall standards in Years 7 to 9 seen during the inspection were well above average. Standards were above average in English and ICT and well above in mathematics and science.
- The rate of improvement in GCSE results over the last five years is similar to that found nationally and the school exceeded its targets in 2003.
- Most successful subjects at GCSE in 2003 were business studies, design and technology, French, history, ICT and mathematics. Subjects that did not reach the national averages were chemistry and humanities.

- Overall, standards seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 were well above average, notably in English, mathematics, ICT, design and technology and drama.
- Across subjects, boys and girls of all attainment levels and students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well in most subjects. The school has been successful in improving the performance of boys. Higher attainers do not achieve well enough in modern foreign languages, geography and religious education.
- Results in the sixth form examinations in 2003 and work seen during the inspection were above average. The achievement of students in the sixth form is good.

Students' personal development and their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. Students enjoy coming to school and have a very positive approach to their learning. There are many examples of the development of students' reflective and spiritual response to experience. Students behave very well; there is occasional unacceptable behaviour at lunchtime and during breaks and some students are too casual about dropping litter. Attendance is good and students almost always arrive at lessons on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. Learning and achievement are effective because the quality of teaching overall is good. Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11. There has been significant improvement since the previous inspection. However, teaching in one lesson in five overall, and in Years 7 to 9, in one lesson in every three, is no better than satisfactory; a small percentage is unsatisfactory. No teaching is deemed to be poor. The curriculum provided by the school is very good. There is a very wide range of choice of courses available to students. In Years 10 and 11 students, who make the most of choices available to them, value the innovative mix of courses. The provision for the arts is very good. The school has built very effective partnerships with parents, the community and other schools and colleges. Approaches to teaching and learning found in the arts are beginning to be used, when appropriate, in other areas of the curriculum. Arts teachers work well in work with partner schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good. Management is satisfactory overall. The headteacher has a very clear view of what the focus of the school should be and the direction it should take. He communicates this very well to staff, students and parents. Thus, the school has a clear sense of purpose. The headteacher is supported very well through the effective leadership and direction provided by the leadership team and other key members of staff. Despite a few areas that do not meet statutory requirements, governors are very effective in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement identified through the work of its key committees. Not all of the school's sense of purpose is turned to reality as aspects of management and quality assurance are inconsistent. The support of teaching that is no better than satisfactory is not systematic or regular enough to bear sufficient fruit. As a result, the achievement of a minority of students is not as high as it could be. There are instances, therefore, where the practice of management does not make a reality of the school's intended ethos and vision.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents value the school and see it as successful. Students in the main school and sixth form speak highly of school and enjoy attending. In particular, they value the care and guidance provided by the school and feel that most of the teaching is very good and challenging. Sixth-formers express some concern about the behaviour of a minority of younger students at break, lunch-times and on the buses.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise the achievement of a minority of students, especially in modern foreign languages, geography and religious education,
- improve the results and achievement in the sixth-form subjects that were below average in 2003,
- strive to make all teaching as good as the best in the school by systematic support, especially in Years 7 to 9, and through the increased awareness of what makes some teaching in the school outstanding,
- manage the site more effectively at breaks and lunchtimes in order to ensure that all students' behaviour is acceptable;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide sufficient time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form,
- provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

THE SIXTH FORM AT MALBANK SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

OVERALL EVALUATION

Malbank Sixth Form College provides a **good standard of education** for its students and is cost-effective. Overall it is an effective sixth form. It has some very good features and deserves its high reputation in the community. Virtually all students progress into higher education, with regular entries to Oxbridge.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A high proportion of teaching seen was very good and in these lessons students achieved very well.
- Curricular provision and enrichment are very good.
- Guidance and pastoral care are very good and have a clear influence on students' success.
- Students' very positive attitudes to their studies contribute to their maturity, confidence and very good personal development.
- There is very good provision in art and design, health and social care, ICT, sport studies and theatre studies.
- Results in 2003 examinations were above average overall. They were below average in business studies, health and social care, physics, geography, government and politics, psychology, sociology, sports studies and travel and tourism - nine out of 26 subjects. There was some underachievement amongst middle-attaining students.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is good . A-level results in 2003 were average, but work seen during the inspection is above average. Teaching and learning are good. Students' very good attitudes help them to achieve well. Provision in German is good . There were no entrants for A-level last year. Standards of work are above average as a result of good teaching and learning. Students' very good attitudes help them to achieve well.
Mathematics	Good provision is made in mathematics. Standards are above average in Year 13. Very good leadership and good teaching ensure that students achieve well. Students show very positive attitudes to learning. Computers are not used sufficiently to enhance learning in lessons
Science	Provision in physics is good . Results at A-level were above average in 2002 but below average in 2003 with some underachievement. Current standards in Year 13 are above average. Good teaching and learning and students' positive attitudes result in good achievement.
Information and communication technology	Very good provision is made in ICT. Students achieve very well because of demanding teaching. This challenges and enables students to improve their learning through critical thinking and to develop into highly effective independent learners.
Humanities	Provision in psychology is good . Standards are average and students achieve well because teaching is good. The use of assessment to ensure good learning is a strength of teaching. The results were below average last year.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art and design is very good and standards are well above average. Teachers enjoy their work and their high expectations result in high quality independent learning. Very good provision is made in theatre studies. Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent. Achievement is very good. In media studies provision is good . Teaching and learning are good and as a result students achieve well. A-level results in 2003 were well above average.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in sport studies is very good . In 2003, examination results were below average. Current standards of work are above average. Very good

teaching and learning and students' very positive attitudes ensure very good achievement.

Health and social care

Very good provision is made in health and social care. Students with very modest GCSE results achieve very well and reach average standards because teaching is very good. The use of work placements to enhance learning is very effective.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students value the challenging, individual targets they are set and always know if they are on track to achieve them. This is part of the **very good** guidance and support, including careers advice and guidance on further and higher education, that enables all students to move successfully into employment, training or higher education. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and build trust and encourage appropriate achievement. Attendance and punctuality are good. The arrangements for recruitment and transfer to the sixth form from other schools are very good. The sixth form centre has good ICT resources and quiet rooms that promote good independent learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. There is a high commitment to promoting equal opportunities by providing a rich and extensive curriculum to meet the needs and aspirations of all students. There is a clear vision of future development. It includes improving achievement and results. Examination results are analysed thoroughly, but the use of target setting for sixth-form subjects is inconsistent; the effective checking of departmental performance during the year is essential to ensure the highest possible standards. Curriculum leadership and management of subjects are good overall and very good in health and social care, ICT, mathematics, psychology and theatre studies.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students find teaching to be good overall and say that teachers help them to improve and achieve well. The range of enrichment activities and planned personal development in tutorials were felt to be effective in widening their experiences. Despite some adverse questionnaire responses, discussions with students indicated that personal advice was readily available.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11. Overall standards in the sixth form are above average. Students achieve well. The personal development of students is very good, although the behaviour of a minority at lunchtimes and breaks is unacceptable.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement overall is good.
- Achievement is very good in drama, as it is in science in Years 7 to 9 and ICT and design and technology in Years 10 and 11.
- Standards are well above average overall.
- Overall achievement in the arts is good.
- Standards are not high enough in modern foreign languages and geography.
- Standards are well below average and achievement is poor in religious education.

Commentary

Results in national tests taken in Year 9

1. Test results in 2003 in English, mathematics and science were well above average compared with all schools in the country. In comparison with students who achieved similar results in tests in Year 6, results were still well above average overall, although in this comparison were above average in English and mathematics. When compared with schools from a similar socio-economic background given evidence of take-up of free school meals, results were well above average. However, results narrowly missed the targets set.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.0 (34.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	38.7 (37.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	37.1 (35.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 219 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Standards and achievement seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9

2. In English and ICT, standards seen are above average and in mathematics and science standards are well above average. These standards, apart from English, match the test results. Standards in other subjects are above average in all subjects except modern foreign languages where standards are average and religious education where they are well below average.
3. Achievement is very good in science and drama and good in all other subjects except modern foreign languages where it is satisfactory and religious education where it is poor. Good achievement is the result of effective learning and good teaching overall. Where achievement is less than good, it is the result of teaching that does not meet the learning needs of all students as well as it should. Such teaching occurs occasionally in English, science, ICT, design and technology, music, art and design, geography, history and physical education;

however, such teaching is especially prevalent in modern foreign languages and religious education.

- Achievement in the performing and visual arts is good overall and very good in drama in response to good teaching in art and design and very good teaching in drama.

Results in GCSE examinations taken in Year 11

- Results at GCSE level in 2003, overall, were well above the national average compared with all schools in the country. In comparison with schools with students who achieved similar results in national tests in Year 9 in 2001, results were also well above average, and in students obtaining five or more grades at A* to G were high. When compared with schools from similar socio-economic backgrounds, the average points score for the best eight subjects was also well above average. Results exceeded the targets the school set itself.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	64.4 (60.1)	51.5 (49.9)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99.0 (98.0)	90.5 (90.9)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99.0 (99.0)	95.9 (96.0)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	41.1 (39.0)	33.6 (34.7)

There were 181 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- The best performing subjects in the 2003 GCSE examinations were business studies, design and technology, French, history, ICT and mathematics. Least successful were chemistry and humanities.
- When comparing how results in some subjects in Malbank compare with others, the most successful subjects were mathematics, drama and business studies and the least successful were humanities, English and chemistry. There was also some noticeable underachievement compared with other subjects in English literature, French, geography and history. Senior management is not doing enough to seek ways of bringing these subjects in line with the more successful subjects. The good features of teaching that make three diverse subjects such as business studies, drama and mathematics the most successful in the school are not considered sufficiently to see if aspects of this teaching might be used to help students to higher performance in other subjects. Such consideration applies, too, in Years 7 to 9 in these subjects as a preparation for the demands of GCSE courses.

Changes since the previous inspection

- Results have improved since the inspection in 1998. Then, GCSE results were above average at five or more higher A*-C grades, but only average compared with similar schools, now results are well above average compared with all and similar schools. Results at five or more A*-G were also above average but now are well above and high compared with similar schools. Of the subjects attaining lower results then, only geography falls into the same category now. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Standards and achievement seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11

9. In English, mathematics, science and ICT, standards seen are well above average. With the exception of English, these standards are close to the GCSE results. Standards in other subjects seen are well above average in design and technology and drama and above average in all other subjects except geography where standards are average and religious education where they are well below average.
10. Achievement overall is good in Years 10 and 11. It is very good in ICT, design and technology and drama, satisfactory in German and geography, and poor in religious education. The quality of teaching is a significant reason for the level of achievement of students. Where achievement is less than good, it is the result of teaching that does not meet the learning needs of all students as well as it should. Such teaching occurs occasionally in science, citizenship, design and technology, geography, French, German and physical education but is more apparent in religious education. In religious education, this is due in part to staffing difficulties and the curriculum organisation of the subject. However, such teaching is less common in Years 10 and 11 than in earlier years, though management might ask the same questions and seek ways of making good or better achievement solid across all subjects, especially geography, German and religious education.
11. Achievement in the performing and visual arts is good overall and very good in drama. This is the result of good teaching in art and design and very good teaching in drama.

'Every child counts'

12. Students with special educational needs achieve well. They are tested regularly to ascertain the effectiveness of the special teaching and support they receive. By Year 10 they usually undertake GCSE studies and attain five or more lower grades. The individual education programmes are productive when used consistently.
13. The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those for whom English is an additional language attain standards and achieve at the same rates as their classmates. The school is committed to maintaining a check on the progress made and overall achievement of these students and does so effectively. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are active in the full life of the school, often being key to successful lessons and enrichment activities.
14. The school identifies a percentage of students deemed to be gifted and talented. In the best lessons suitable challenges are presented for these students. In less successful lessons the individual learning needs of students are not sufficiently met. Overall, however, students deemed as gifted and talented achieve well and respond well to enrichment and extension opportunities provided by the school.
15. Basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are seen as a right for all students. As a result these skills are practised as part of the planning in most subjects, although some more effectively than others. ICT in particular, is used well in all subjects, but could be more effectively and imaginatively employed to enhance learning in a minority of subjects. Most subjects have taken ICT to heart and so have made heavy demands on the resources available. ICT as a discrete subject is very popular and also demanding of resources. The school is aware of this and realises the need for more resources so that those not using ICT as fully as others are not squeezed out. The competency of students in these basic skills is secure in most instances and students achieve in their use in keeping with the levels that are expected of them.

Sixth form

Students' achievement is good and standards of work and results are above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in art and design, health and social care, ICT, sport studies and theatre studies because teaching is very good.
- Standards of work are well above average in art and design.
- In 2003 the results in English language, ICT and media studies were well above average.
- Results were below average in business studies, geography, health and social care, physics, government and politics, psychology, sociology, sport studies and travel and tourism.
- Achievement is good overall, but there was some underachievement amongst middle attainers in the 2003 examinations.
- Course completion rates are high throughout the sixth form.

Commentary

Results in GCE A/AS examinations

16. Results were well above average in 2001 and have been above average for the last two years. The average point score fell last year because the same number of students made fewer entries. Smaller numbers of students are now taking four subjects and there were only 17 entries for general studies last year compared to 54 the previous year. The average points score per subject entry has remained the same and in this respect the results have not fallen. Nevertheless, the local education authority analysis indicates some underachievement in the results last year.
17. At A-level the proportion of passes at the higher grades, 38 per cent, is close to the national average of 42 per cent. Whereas females do as well as females nationally at these higher pass rates, males do less well than males nationally and this also has an effect on the average point score per student. Details of the results in each subject are given at the start of the sixth form subject section.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	98.7 (88.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	38.0 (33.9)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	256.0 (278.4)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 120 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Changes since the previous inspection

18. Changes to the examination system make comparisons difficult. For this reason improvement since the previous inspection is not judged in the tables in the sixth-form subject section of this report. However, overall results in 1998 were well above average at A-level and currently overall results are above average. In part this is explained by a more open sixth form, especially in welcoming a wide range of students to Year 12. The work seen during the inspection matches that seen in most subjects indicated in the 1998 report's main findings.

Standards of work seen during the inspection

19. Attainment at the start of the sixth form is average overall. In Year 13, standards have improved and are above average. Learning is, therefore, effective and achievement is good..
20. Overall, current standards of work are above average and similar or better than previous results. They reflect good achievement of students in response to predominantly very good teaching and the very positive attitudes students have to their learning.
21. Achievement in theatre studies and art and design is very good. A music lesson was sampled and achievement in that was good. No dance was seen in the sixth form, but a number of sixth-formers join a recreational dance class on Wednesday afternoons.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students have **very good** attitudes to their learning and respond very well when opportunities occur for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Relationships are very good and behaviour in lessons is good. Overall, behaviour is good. However, at breaks and lunch-times about school the behaviour and lack of consideration for each other and others about the school shown by a minority of students is in contrast with the very good attitudes and behaviour they have in lessons. The attendance rate is good and students are punctual to lessons.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very positive attitudes contribute to the creation of a good climate for learning in most lessons.
- The best teaching seeks opportunities to help students to see the relevance of learning to their personal aspirations.
- Opportunities are missed in assemblies, time with tutors and often in lessons to add a spiritual or cultural dimension to students' learning.
- The school has no system of identifying or monitoring the effectiveness of its provision for students' personal development.
- Behaviour about the school at lunchtime and breaks is sometimes unacceptable.
- Good attendance and punctuality ensure students have maximum learning opportunities.
- Registration time is not used effectively to promote students' personal development.

Commentary

Students' spiritual development

22. In their attitudes to work and to each other, students are generous in recognising worth in the efforts of others. In a drama lesson with Year 11, for example, where students were representing their feelings about war and terrorism, students, when being an audience, were quiet, attentive and sensitive to the subject matter. They felt the implications of the horror being presented in a mixed-media presentation. In German course-work, they show in their writing a sensitivity to the reality of Jewish life through their response to reading extracts from 'The Diary of Anne Frank'. Year 11 wonder at the complexity of the life cycle of the stars as they watch the teacher's PowerPoint presentation – they are amazed: 'You can't get your head around it'. These examples are telling since the teachers saw the opportunity to engage the human spirit as part of the learning in the lesson. This is not always the case. In all but one assembly, except for the special sense of occasion created by having live music as students entered and left the hall, students were given almost no opportunity to reflect on the themes such as 'Friendship', 'Mothers', 'Suffering in Rwanda'. The last of these was developed as students reflected on 'it's a mystery how these horrors happen' referring to the suffering from aids, the need for prevention and drugs. As students left this assembly, the band played 'Yesterday' hauntingly and it was possible to sense the personal thinking that the assembly had provoked in

most students. The best teaching is sensitive to opportunities to capture reflection in lessons. A drama lesson with Year 8 had been about people setting off to start a new life – The Oregon Trail. Students found much of this difficult to comprehend and struggled to meet the objectives of the lesson. The teacher had projected a picture of the real-life explorers that was visible throughout the lesson. In the last section of the lesson he asked the class to make still images of their journey and look for similarities with the picture. The lesson was about to end as the class gathered to leave. The teacher finally asked them to glance at the projected image again. As they did he put on some suitable music that focused the reflection of the class and rescued the lesson from mediocrity; the students put themselves in the role of the explorers and made the learning their own. Teachers who realise the value of this aspect of personal development share their own excitement with students. In an ICT lesson, the teacher shared with the class his sense of awe at the vastness of invention that makes it possible to store such vast quantities of information in electronic form – an invention that is really very recent. Only the best teaching encourages students to explore what gives them a buzz and how this might be shared with students.

Students' moral and social development

23. There is a strange paradox in the school. Students generally are warm, outward-looking and care about each other. When working in groups they enjoy the cut and thrust of debate or solving problems together. They listen to the views of others and do not force their own thoughts or personalities unduly. This occurs because most teachers create a very good climate in lessons that allows such interaction to occur. However, there are occasions where teachers are too much of a presence for the students so that this moral and social learning is not properly a part of them. A significant minority of these same, co-operative students does not show that this behaviour is the result of self-discipline. When unsupervised at breaks and lunch-times some show a lack of courtesy and consideration for each other, use foul language without any sense of its inappropriateness and drop litter without hesitation. There seems to be no correspondence with learning situations in which they perform so well in the classroom. Sixth form students were aware of these anomalies and baffled by them. In lessons, students successfully debated the morality issues raised in 'Macbeth' or 'To Kill a Mocking Bird' with sensitivity and perception. Others argued against the stereotyping of women in 'Of Mice and Men' or considered issues of global morality in history lessons. They expressed heart-felt views on significant matters of social morality about fair trading or the rightness of the school being all-inclusive. Many teachers provide excellent opportunities to exercise moral and social awareness. Inspectors were very impressed by the qualities almost all students showed themselves to have in lessons yet found some of behaviour that happened about the school unacceptable.
24. On the other hand, many of these students wear other hats. They might be doing work-related learning or work experience in environments where they show sensitivity to the well-being of others. They might be members of the school council planning charity fund-raising events; students take the initiative and support many local, national and international causes. When on a range of international or local visits their exemplary behaviour is often commented on formally in letters to the school. It is clear that in fact students develop a good understanding of moral codes and can adjust their social behaviour to any situation they find themselves in. They need to be helped to mend their Achilles' heel as seen in some unsupervised behaviour.

Students' cultural development

25. Students value the principle driving the school that 'every child counts'. Students help and support each other. Those with learning difficulties are respected and helped. The small number of minority ethnic students are full members of the community of the school because of the positive attitudes of other students. Opportunities are taken and provided by the school to celebrate cultural diversity. Students enjoy studying and practising the art of other cultures and finding the meaning behind cultural symbols in , for example, Aboriginal art with Year 7. Music students enjoy playing together. Members of a brass ensemble playing in an assembly

were sensitive to the arrangement of parts and the dynamics of the piece. Many students had played leading parts recently in a community production of 'Noyes Fludde' and experienced a thrill at being part of this British, cultural, choral tradition in the community of their own town. Students in Year 11 argued against the racial prejudice they found in 'Of Mice and Men'. The school is a place where teachers value diversity and encourage an appreciation of it in students.

26. These examples describe a school that provides very well for the personal development of students. The provision in a sense, however, is pragmatic and the result of the professional standards most teachers set themselves; the school does not check and record the extent of the opportunities it provides for students' personal development. Teachers help students develop a sense of their own identity. They create relationships that help students appreciate the values that are at the heart of the headteacher's vision for the school, developed over many years. Not all teachers are alert to the opportunities to enhance the personal development of students. The school has yet to formulate a policy and state its intentions more formally.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	6.4	School data :	0.1
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.

27. Attendance is good throughout the school. Any attendance concerns are carefully followed up. However, there is currently no full first-day contact system to ensure the school knows accurately where all absent students are on a daily basis.
28. The 15 minutes of registration time in the mornings is not used effectively. In many registrations observed the time was not planned for any specific purpose and as a consequence there were missed opportunities to further promote students' personal development.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1271	43	2
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	9	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	9	0	0

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

Sixth form

Behaviour in the sixth form is very good. Students have very positive attitudes to their work. Attendance is good and personal development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are enthusiastic about their learning.
- Relationships between sixth-formers and with staff are very good.
- Sixth-formers are committed to contributing to the overall life of the school.
- Sixth-formers are very good role models for younger students.
- Students respond well to the enrichment opportunities provided for them by the school.

Commentary

29. Students' very good attitudes ensure that they get the most from their lessons and their learning is effective. Very good relationships between teachers and students and amongst students from wide and variable backgrounds create a good climate for learning. Students share ideas willingly and learn well from each other; they seek to do their best and to achieve well.
30. Students play an important part in school and community life by helping staff in the organisation of sporting and artistic events, supporting younger students in tutorial lessons and aspects of their acquisition of basic skills. They give a generosity of spirit to these sorts of support activities.
31. Sixth formers' personal development, especially their social development, is strong. They take the lead in encouraging the school to support charities with which they feel some affinity. They willingly take musical and dramatic performances into community venues and local primary schools.

32. The daily presence of these young adults about the school serves the school well. Younger students often aspire to their own time in the sixth form through association with the positive roles sixth-formers present. Sixth-formers seek help from their teachers as they strive to do well in their studies.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **good** quality of education for all students which matches its intention to make sure that 'every child counts'. Teaching and learning are good overall. A very good curriculum provides a very good range of worthwhile activities, in and out of lessons, to meet the differing learning needs of students. The accommodation and resources available are good. The quality of care is very good and students receive very good support, advice and guidance.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is **good** overall. It is very good in Years 10 and 11. This means that students learn and achieve well and, sometimes, very well. Students' work is assessed well overall and very well in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching means that students achieve well overall.
- Lessons move at a fast pace.
- Teachers intervene as students work in order to deepen and strengthen learning.
- Learning support assistants contribute well to the learning of students with special educational needs.
- The best lessons are notable for the enthusiasm and energy of the teacher.
- Teachers modify the lesson's pace and teaching methods to suit students' different needs.
- Not all teachers are aware of the quality of the best teaching in the school as there is insufficient effort to make sure that what makes very good or excellent teaching is shared so that other teachers can learn from it.
- Some teaching is no better than satisfactory and management does not do enough to improve this teaching and to help teachers create opportunities for more effective learning.

Commentary

33. Teaching is good overall throughout the school, but better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9; this, too, was the judgement in 1998. It has improved overall since the previous inspection, but teaching in Years 7 to 9 still does not match that in Years 10 and 11, even though the previous inspection gave a good number of pointers to how teaching overall could be improved. Management has not tackled this issue adequately. In six out of 181 lessons teaching is unsatisfactory. No teaching is poor. Teaching in the sixth form is good.
34. In 1998, teaching overall was seen to be good or better in three out of five lessons; it is now good or better in almost four out of five. In a number of subjects [for example in the teaching at Years 10 and 11 in English, ICT, design and technology and drama throughout the school], the quality of learning and achievement that results from very good teaching is plain to see and is what a very good school should aspire to constantly. Some efforts have been made at senior and departmental level to monitor and support teaching designed to improve it further, but in too many cases opportunities to do this have not been taken.
35. The more successful teaching is characterised, for example, by:

- In English the best teaching is by teachers who share their enthusiasm for the subject and give students structured opportunities to work independently, taking pride in their outcomes. Marking is specific and shows students how to improve their writing. In reading, demanding skills, such as inference, receive attention.
- In ICT, assessment is used well in order that work can be studied in significant depth, yet tasks undertaken by students have been prepared by teachers to meet differing learning needs.
- In design and technology, target-setting and monitoring of progress towards targets influence the planning of lessons. Approaches to work are consistent and lessons end with a careful analysis of what has been achieved so that learning is consolidated.
- Learning support assistants, who have been involved in the planning of the lesson, show considerable skill and commitment when working with individuals or groups. Their skilful and effective use was notable in science and ICT classes.
- In drama, teachers plan lessons with carefully structured sequences that enable students to achieve targets that are clearly defined for them. Brisk pace, high expectations and supportive yet challenging intervention by the teacher were features of all lessons seen. This results in students wanting to develop and refine their skills.
- In excellent lessons seen, teaching was enthusiastic, energetic and imaginative. Teachers knew how students learn effectively and within the hour of the lesson provided a mix of approaches that kept the attention and committed interest of students. There was active participation in pairs or groups to prepare, perhaps, for sustained periods of quiet individual writing or making. The teacher was always at hand and involved, challenging students to do their best and duly celebrated their successes.

36. The weaker teaching in several subjects, but notably in geography, modern foreign languages and religious education, is characterised by:

- Minor instances of disruptive behaviour are not immediately managed successfully.
- Lessons lack pace or time is wasted getting started.
- Aspects of learning are not sufficiently linked – for example new vocabulary or grammar is not applied to a real situation in writing or speaking.
- There is a lack of variety; students are rarely taken by surprise and their attention heightened. For example, there is too much routine note-taking from written sources that rarely is placed in a real-life situation.
- Low expectations and a lack of rigour in planning work to meet the wide range of learning needs found in some classes.
- Teachers too readily accept work that is unfinished.

Summary of all teaching observed during the inspection in 181 lessons, including the sixth form

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (2.2%)	64 (35.4%)	75 (41.4%)	32 (17.7%)	6 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	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.

37. The proportion of very good or excellent teaching in Years 10 and 11 is higher than that found nationally. As a result the overall quality of learning in these years is well above average. In the best lessons there is a strong focus on what students should learn and lessons have clearly stated learning objectives. These are explained carefully and regularly re-visited during the lesson. They are also reviewed at the ends of lessons and students encouraged to sum up how well the objectives have been realised.
38. Skilful teaching consolidates students' understanding of processes through approaches to teaching and learning to which students contribute fully. Such teaching has pace and challenge and lessons are demanding but gripping and enjoyable. Successful teaching owes much to the

good relationships established by the teacher and the energy of the teacher combined with a tangible enjoyment of the subject. In such a climate, teachers can take calculated risks and be imaginative to approaches to teaching and learning. This is an aspect of teaching that the school is now required to develop as part of its responsibilities as a specialist arts college.

39. The more mundane lessons, sometimes in Years 7 to 9, lack a strong focus on what students should learn. Activities to be undertaken are planned in advance, but their purpose is not always clear. Students themselves do not always know what they are striving to achieve. Students usually show very positive attitudes to their learning but still can be confused if what they are aiming to achieve is not clear. This can lead to lapses in concentration and minor inappropriate behaviour; however, the reason for this rests in teaching that has failed to engage them sufficiently. If the range of methods used by teachers is too narrow it does not retain students' interest and motivation weakens. The balance between learning that has a focus on listening, that with a focus on looking and that which requires active participation are not always considered by teachers. Teaching that, whilst satisfactory, falls short of being good occurred in almost a third of lessons in Years 7 to 9 and nearly a quarter of lessons in Years 10 and 11. There is a need, sometimes, for students to be given an opportunity to pause and reflect on what they are learning, so that learning can be pinpointed; in some lessons students were set off on sometimes repetitive tasks for long periods without the chance to catch breath or for the teacher to check whether learning was secure. Changes of energy are infrequent so that a sense of tiredness in teaching and learning pervades a minority of lessons.
40. Learning and teaching in the arts are almost always very good and sometimes excellent. A key feature is that teachers are also practising artists: dancers, musicians and composers, media analysts, theatrical actors and directors, visual artists. This means that within the processes of teaching and learning an aesthetic awareness is always present. For example, the playing of music at the end of a drama lesson about 'The Oregon Trail' put the students' own work into an aesthetic framework. In a Year 7 dance lesson, technical work was effective on 'travelling' and students then realised a sequence of imaginative journeys through Nantwich in dance, using drafts prepared theoretically in advance. This was successful owing to skilled and knowledgeable teaching. The relationship of media images in Year 11's drama about war and terrorism, music and physical movement over different height levels gave the drama aesthetic shape. The arts in school are, rightly, considered to be about attracting imaginative attention. The relationship of attracting and reacting, complex yet simple is at the centre of much of the work across the arts disciplines. The teachers 'as artist' successfully ensure that this central core of creativity is tackled at key points in lessons.
41. There is a shared belief amongst arts staff – and this was a central tenet of the bid for arts college status – that the arts are equally for all. Students with special needs have their successes, their self-esteem is heightened and as a result they strive and succeed in GCSE examinations. No matter whether it is in with extra support in mainstream classes, or withdrawal groups or special small classes the teaching is sensitively and capably delivered. All students are given chances to create their own work, speak in response to their own thinking and feeling, through doing and making in the arts. They appraise each other's work and that of established artists as part of the reflective process through which learning is enhanced and their own work developed. The importance of this connection is central to the arts teaching in the school and also connects with each student's view of self as artist or musician and what they are saying about their world. Valuing their world as well as extending it is part of the good practice of arts teaching in the school. It allows all students a place in arts learning.
42. The use of assessment is generally good. During lessons teachers intervene appropriately whilst students are working in order to extend and challenge as well as check that their learning is on track. This knowledge also informs their planning of subsequent lessons. Data are used well by most departments to locate students' targets and check on their rate of progress and overall achievement. This too has an effect on teaching methods adopted for parts of lessons. Work is marked regularly and, usually, helpful annotations and comments provided by teachers point the way to students for further development or improvement.

Sixth form

Teaching in the sixth form is good overall, often very good and occasionally excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching of the arts is very good and sometimes excellent.
- Teachers know their subjects well and share their enjoyment of them with students.
- Lessons are thoroughly planned to take account of immediate learning needs and the examination specifications.
- Teachers support students effectively through one-to-one dialogue to enhance students' learning.
- Marking and assessment are mostly good, although in some subjects teachers do not sufficiently inform students about how they could rise the standard of their work.

Commentary

43. Teaching is good overall and very good or excellent in 52.5 per cent of lessons. This places the quality of teaching amongst that of the best 37 per cent of school sixth forms for very good or excellent teaching. In five of the eleven subjects that were a focus for the inspection [ICT, art and design, theatre studies, sports studies and health and social care] teaching is very good and students learn and achieve well in lessons. In the remaining six subjects [English literature, German, mathematics, physics, psychology and media studies] teaching, learning and achievement are good. In the subjects sampled very good teaching and learning were seen in government and politics, history, design and technology and music.

Summary of teaching observed in the sixth form during the inspection in 61 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (5.0%)	29 (47.5%)	21 (34.4%)	8 (13.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	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.

44. Students learn well in lessons and achieve well in their courses. Teachers structure their lessons well and expect students to produce sufficient quality and quantity, to meet the requirements of the examination. They rarely are prepared to accept work that is unfinished. Teachers encourage students to work independently and use research skills to support their studies. In English literature, for example, Year 12 students studying 'Dr Faustus' were divided into three groups, each with a different research specification the results of which were to be fed-back at a later stage. Key resources for students, however, are the very good knowledge teachers have of their subject, the enthusiasm with which they teach and the energy and pace they bring to lessons. In media studies, for example, Year 12 students studying trends in the presentation of police series on television needed to respond to informed, sharp and rapid questioning by the teacher about representation of class and society's view of the police in a deconstruction of an excerpt from 'Dixon of Dock Green'. The teachers' enthusiasm for media kept a focus for students' learning. Teaching in the sixth form that was only satisfactory as distinct from this good or better teaching, occurred in just eight out of 61 lessons. In this small minority of lessons teaching lacked flair and failed to engage students at the level expected in a sixth form lesson.
45. In psychology, teachers have high expectations of students. In a lesson tackling theories of relationship maintenance, some very good teaching strove to make the topic interesting. There was a clear understanding of the learning needs of the group, the teacher pressed the students to make sense of their learning through making constructive observations during well-chosen practical activities that held their interest. Year 13 art and design students were working on the

theme 'City and Decay'. Students had taken many photographs of local buildings. The emphasis on decay was skilfully portrayed through emphasis on rough surfaces, represented in sketchbooks by torn pages. This imaginative approach reflected skilful and lateral-thinking approaches to teaching and learning. As a result in the subsequent paintings, students created a wide variety of different surface effects and the effect these will have on somebody looking at the painting. Working in the physical style of Berkoff in theatre studies with Year 13, there was a similar concentration on form, this time in using canes to define areas of space, constantly changing, and the consequent pressures on the human mind. In an excellent ICT lesson with nine Year 13 students, their views about humans as machines and artificial intelligence were tested to the full. The students had to defend taken standpoints convincingly. Very good use was made by the teacher of on-line resources to demonstrate and also to stimulate thought. The lesson's strength was its challenge – three female students responded very well to the pace and demands of the lesson. In another excellent example of teaching in a Year 13 health and social care lesson about the social influences on health, students quickly identified emotional, social and intellectual health as well as physical through a very good introduction by the teacher using high level skills of question and answer. The teacher then used some very good practical activity requiring discussion and decision-making to create 'a wall of good health'. The teacher's skill was in the realisation of the value of a change of energy and focus to this practical activity, which was stretched by the teacher's probing, suggesting and further questioning.

46. All of the examples given have a creative approach to learning and teaching in common. A specialist arts college is expected to develop creative approaches to teaching and learning within and beyond the arts. Some lessons were about problems requiring creative, imaginative answers, others required imaginative leads to be given by the teacher. Learning sought to be personal so that what was learned became part of the learner – at best they 'felt' for their learning and experienced a shift in understanding as a result of their learning; students made personal connections with their learning. The school has shown a commitment to this sophisticated approach to learning. It is at an early stage yet in many curriculum areas; it has yet to become embedded in all teachers' learning goals for lessons. At present, management is not doing enough not just in sixth form teaching, to facilitate active experience amongst teachers across departments through collaborative projects, planning, observation and joint celebration of what works well. The best teachers already seek unexpected opportunities for learning and to learn themselves from the experience.
47. In the sixth form, homework is used well to support and extend learning. Marking responds effectively to essays and course-work and students value the detailed help they receive when their work is annotated and commented on by teachers. This and other forms of assessment are secure in the sixth form. Data are generally used effectively to inform students of their achievement to date. Careful analysis of examination results effectively results in some re-thinking of approaches to teaching and learning.

Curriculum

The school's curriculum has improved since the previous inspection and is now **very good**. A very wide programme of enrichment enhances the taught curriculum and contributes to students' very good personal development. Overall the provision of resources and accommodation is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum successfully provides for all students and meets their interests, aptitudes and particular needs.
- The school has enriched and extended its curriculum by taking full advantage of its specialist arts college status so that there is an excellent range of subjects throughout the school.
- Curriculum planning is at least good in most subjects and supports good teaching. Together, these underpin good achievement and standards are above average.
- Many students take part in a very extensive range of extra-curricular activities.
- The programmes of personal, social and health education and citizenship are very good.
- Statutory requirements to provide religious education in Years 10 and 11 are not fully met, largely due to staffing problems and the subsuming of religious education within citizenship.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.
- The lack of provision of modern technology for teaching in science is a barrier to improvement.
- Teaching in German is over-reliant on commercially produced resources and this reduces students' achievement.
- There is not enough technician time to support practical subjects.

Commentary

48. The imaginative and exciting curriculum provides very good learning opportunities for boys and girls with differing learning needs and from a variety of backgrounds. It enables them to make good progress and achieve well as they move through the school. In Years 7 to 9, it includes drama and dance as separate subjects and in Years 8 and 9 higher-attaining students take two modern languages from a choice of French, German or Spanish.
49. In Years 10 and 11, students have a very wide choice of subjects from five option groupings, which, in addition to their compulsory subjects, means that they can take up to ten GCSEs. Many take the three separate sciences and there are three applied GCSE subjects and two GNVQ courses for those who prefer more relevant vocational learning. This provision adds coherence and progression in the 14 to 19 age range and seeks to meet the aspirations of individual students.
50. At times during the year the normal timetable is suspended to accommodate special theme days as, for example, the 'Green Day' and the three-day 'Health Workshop' in Year 10. These are part of the programme of personal, social and health and citizenship. Although not occurring during the inspection, work displayed on corridors clearly indicated that they were very successful and enjoyed by students.
51. Provision for the arts is good. Drama is well established and successful. Music is under new leadership and developing well. Dance lessons are held effectively in the hall, although it is not a suitable space. Students experience good provision for media studies as part of English. There are several drama and dance clubs, music groups and visits where students enrich and extend their experience of the arts.
52. The school organises an exceptionally wide range of learning outside school hours. Revision and booster classes contribute effectively to the school's results. The list of clubs, visits, trips and other special activities is exhaustive. Unusual opportunities include work experience in the diplomatic service, expeditions to Borneo and the recently established European citizenship

links with schools in Sweden, Italy and Bulgaria. Participation in the many musical and drama events is very good and there is a good range of recreational and competitive sport.

53. Students with special educational needs not only have full access to the school curriculum but there are good extra facilities in ICT and the school is actively developing new vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 to meet students' needs and aspirations. Members of staff who work to give support to students with special educational needs are well deployed, and carry out their activities effectively.
54. The school, in the main, makes good use of the experience and expertise of its staff team. The staff team has a good understanding of its roles and responsibilities within the school. The majority of teachers has the necessary knowledge of their subjects to ensure that the academic demands of advanced level students is met, and have the range of professional skills to teach all students from Year 7 to Year 13. The teaching of religious education suffers from long-term absence of the head of department and temporary staffing. Its place within citizenship is not an adequate provision to meet requirements. The school has not kept pace with the increase and improvement in facilities in science in the hours of support provided by technicians. This is having some negative effect on students' learning in science; this is a similar concern to that found at the previous inspection.
55. Accommodation is good and will be further improved when the new building is completed, notably in dance and music. It is already very good in English, drama and physical education. The latter benefits from excellent hard surfaces and an all-weather playing area, thereby catering for a diversity of outdoor sports. Changing rooms are less good. Accommodation in science has improved with two new laboratories but a full refurbishment is required. Rooms in design and technology are of adequate size but there is no clean area for electronics. There are deficiencies in ICT, as the layout of some rooms does not permit all students to hear easily. Overall, the deficiencies in accommodation do not have a significant effect on standards and are currently being tackled through the school's building programme.
56. Resources are particularly good in the performing arts as befits the school's arts college status. Lighting and other resources in drama are a booster for achievement, especially for boys who enjoy hands-on technical work. There is one computer for every three students in the school and the newly built music suite will benefit from a wide range of modern technology, especially for work in composition. All teachers use their laptop computers to record attendance. However, there are insufficient computers and peripheral equipment located within some subject areas, for example, mathematics, science and religious education. The result is that ICT skills are not practised consistently in these subjects.

Sixth form

The quality of the curriculum is very good. Provision of accommodation and resources is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An excellent range of 29 subjects successfully includes all students as it meets their interests, aptitudes and aspirations.
- Most students take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Statutory requirements to include religious education and a daily act of worship are not met.

Commentary

57. The curriculum provides opportunities for students to take up to five advanced level subjects. In Year 12, most students take four subjects to AS level. In Year 13, most take three subjects to A2 level but a small number take four. Students can now mix vocational with traditional academic subjects.

58. Students have the opportunity to take general studies but few continue with this beyond AS level. It was only possible to sample one Year 12 lesson during the inspection. Teaching was very good and standards were above average in a debate about the Euro. In 2003, results in general studies were above average at AS level and average at A-level.
59. The time for private study varies. It is used productively to develop skills of independent learning that prepare students well for study in higher education.
60. Students in the sixth form have a very good range of enrichment activities on Wednesday afternoons. These include work experience, first-aid courses, creative writing, dance, Young Enterprise and sports including the Community Sports Leader Award. When they join the sixth form Year 12 go to Festival Park for a day and this is an excellent opportunity for students and staff to get to know each other. Every June, Year 12 students work with leaders of business in a two-day conference run by the Business Dynamics Group producing business plans and presentations. In addition students arrange their own concerts, dances and events to raise money for their adopted charity, Barnado's.

The specialist arts college and Artsmark Gold

61. Drama and theatre studies are well established and meeting the goals set out in the bid for specialist status. Music, under its new leadership and soon with state-of-the art facilities is making a good start and has full curriculum provision. Numbers at the moment are higher than average in Years 10 and 11. Dance, too, will benefit from a forthcoming building programme; at present its development is impaired by the lack of a dance space / studio with a suitable floor, lighting and sound equipment. The provision for dance is an area for growth to meet the requirements of arts college status. Artsmark Gold status complements the specialist college status and recognises the strength of work in visual arts and media. Both awards carry implications for development across the curriculum. The innovative approach the school brings to its curriculum design augurs well for success in bringing arts experience and creativity 'across and beyond subject boundaries' [Artsmark Gold application, page 10]. Findings during this inspection indicate that these principles are emerging in a number of subjects across the curriculum, where creative and imaginative approaches are seen where teaching is very good or excellent.

Care, guidance and support

Students' care, welfare and safety and the quality of students' support, advice and guidance are **very good**. This provision is based on very good relationships and individual care for students. The school values the views put forward by students about life at school and responds very positively to them.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good procedures for induction help students settle in well.
- Very good guidance by teachers and other adults in the school supports students' learning.
- Procedures for child protection and health and safety are very good.

Commentary

62. Very good procedures for induction ensure that students settle quickly into Year 7. Members of staff spend considerable time visiting all feeder primary schools to help students prepare for the transition. The overwhelming majority of questionnaires returned by parents agree that the good procedures helped their child to settle in quickly. The great majority of students attend a residential activities week shortly after joining the school and this helps students to develop new

friendships from the start. Close and very good relationships of students with tutors, teachers and older students, who act as buddies, contribute to a very good quality of care.

63. Form tutors and the three leaders of Years 7 to 9, Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form provide very good pastoral and academic support for students through the monitoring systems that are in place. In discussions, students are very clear of their targets in most subjects and what they need to do to improve and exceed the targets set. Planners are used effectively, particularly in Years 7 to 9, for students to monitor their progress against these targets. Students are confident that there is a member of staff they can confide in. Through a well-organised school council process, students are given very good opportunities to help improve the school environment and organise fund raising activities. The school's aim of 'Every child counts' is very well achieved through strong pastoral support programmes. For example regular meetings are held at which key staff initiate and monitor programmes for students identified as being at risk of underachieving.
64. The school's provision of guidance for further studies and careers is very good and very well supported through the local Connexions service. The school has gained 'Investors in Careers' status and has a high commitment to ensure that all students have access to the appropriate guidance to meet their individual needs. The programme begins in Year 7 and from Year 8 Connexions are appropriately involved. A planned scheme of lessons is carefully organised with an opportunity for work experience in Year 10. Students in Year 11 are given interviews and good opportunities to experience sixth form life to support their choices. The careers department is well resourced with library and Internet access to support students' independent research.
65. Students with special educational needs enjoy significant degrees of care and support, both academically and pastorally. The 'Inclusion Handbook' has been written and is now a thorough and essential part of the whole-school procedures. This process of care is actively led by an assistant headteacher, the special educational needs co-ordinator and other senior colleagues. The group of staff that works with external agencies to meet the needs of students under pressure is particularly impressive.
66. Procedures for child protection and 'looked after children' are very good. Members of staff, including new staff to the school, are made fully aware of these procedures and are constantly alert to concerns or changes in students' attitudes. Procedures for health and safety are very good and governors fulfil their duties. The school's arrangements to ensure that students are aware of the dangers posed by the Internet are effective and appropriate controls are in place. Students understanding of their role in protecting the environment has been well promoted through specific theme days, for example through practical work during 'Green Day'.

Sixth form

The quality of care, guidance and support is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good induction into the sixth form helps students to settle quickly.
- Very good internal advice and guidance support students' aspirations.
- Very good use of targets helps students to understand what they need to do to achieve well.

Commentary

67. In their questionnaires, several students felt that they did not have someone they could confide in who could suggest or recommend what to study and advise on further studies. However, discussion with many sixth form students, showed that teachers have good open relationships with students and that the advice prior to joining and during the sixth form is very good.
68. There is a high retention rate of students on courses reflecting very good guidance and a strong commitment from students to achieve. The school ensures very good guidance for students in Year 11 from this and surrounding schools about the options available for them in the sixth form. Students are made well aware of the options open to them. They have high aspirations and many are keen to continue their education at institutes of higher education. In discussion students said that the sixth form provides very good preparation for the next stage in their careers. For example, in Year 12, specific guidance lessons are planned to help students develop independent research skills and develop their own career plans.
69. As in Years 7 to 11, very good procedures to monitor students' progress and to set targets help students to improve their work. Students reported that they find the opportunities to discuss work and progress helpful and informative. They also value the individual time teachers spend to make them aware of what they need to do to improve.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents, other schools and the community is **very good** and promotes effective relationships. Such partnerships enhance students' education.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have very positive views of the school.
- Very good relationships with the local and wider community support learning.
- Information provided to parents is good overall.

Commentary

70. Analysis of the returns of parents' questionnaires show that almost all parents agree that their child likes school, is expected to do her or his best, makes good progress and that teaching is good. Inspection findings broadly support these views.
71. Some parents felt they were not sufficiently informed about progress. At present the school provides an annual opportunity to meet teachers, and parents receive an annual report of their child's progress. This frequency is in line with the expected minimum requirements; however, many secondary schools provide summary information on students' progress each term to keep parents more regularly informed. The school has already started to consider this addition since the installation of a new computerised monitoring system earlier this year.
72. Parental involvement in the school is good. the great majority of parents attend parents' evenings. The overwhelming majority of parents regularly sign and review students' academic progress through their child's personal planners. These planners are also effective two-way communication tools between home and school. The vast majority of parents also ensure that their child attends regularly and punctually. The Malbank School Association provides considerable funds to support learning in the school and functions are well attended. The association is also a useful sounding board when the school is considering new initiatives. The school actively involves parents formally through asking for a selection of parents' views in a questionnaire and informally through the headteacher's prominent profile at events involving parents.

73. The quality of the documentation that the school provides for parents is good. Students' annual reports are good. They provide a clear understanding of what students know, understand and can do and what students need to do next to improve. Students also complete a personal statement to reflect on their achievement. The reporting of grades and results shows inconsistencies in approach between departments and can be confusing to understand. The school prospectus provides a succinct overview of the school and the governors' annual report to parents provides a full celebration of the school life.
74. Parents are invited to the annual reviews of students with special educational needs and have the opportunity of frequent consultation about the needs as they arise. The special educational needs co-ordinator makes particular efforts to ease the transition of students with special educational needs by making personal visits to key primary schools.
75. As part of its responsibility as a specialist arts college, the school successfully takes teaching programmes in music to a number of local primary schools. Musical events, such as a production of 'Noyes Fludde' involve the school's expertise in the community. Year 12 students of theatre studies are shortly to take a well-rehearsed version of 'The Canterbury Tales' to a local church. Carol concerts are held annually in local churches and about the community of Nantwich.
76. The school has developed very good links with the community, especially through subject links. Visitors are often invited into school to extend students' learning further. For example, visiting speakers give valued support to the guidance programme in the sixth form that sixth formers find helpful. The community actively supports the school's programme of work experience for students in Year 10. Links with feeder schools are very good and teachers spend considerable time promoting them. The school has a very effective partnership with a further education college, which provides valuable links for students to learn at first hand the techniques of manufacturing. The students attending the college flourish under the expert tuition and as a result show outstanding attitudes to their learning. Links with other countries have also developed well providing opportunities for both staff and students to learn from different experiences. For example, the school is currently involved in the development of citizenship with links to a variety of European schools.
77. In the sixth form there are very good links with the local community and industry. For example, some sixth-form students work in local primary schools at lunchtimes. Connections with local universities and local colleges provide good advice to support students' career ambitions. Parents of sixth form students continue to be involved in their children's learning and many attend consultation evenings.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good**. Very good visionary leadership of the headteacher inspires management to develop and improve the school's provision through effective teamwork. The leadership of the leadership team and other key members of staff is very good. Governors are very effective as critical friends of the school. Overall, management of the school is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership by the headteacher has resulted in a positive forward-thinking atmosphere.
- There is insufficient monitoring and support for the less successful teaching.
- The governing body is very effective and has considerable expertise for holding the school to account.
- Managers and governors are supportive of the headteacher's vision.
- Arts college responsibilities are quietly and efficiently managed.

- Management does not ensure that all students behave in an acceptable manner during breaks and lunchtimes.
- The governing body does not meet statutory requirements for religious education or the daily provision of a corporate act of worship for all students.

Commentary

Leadership

78. The very good leadership of the headteacher, leadership group, departmental and key stage managers are important reasons for the school's good achievement. The headteacher provides energetic, inspirational leadership and promotes a strong partnership amongst staff through very effective teamwork. As a result the majority of staff is extremely hardworking and committed to achieving the shared vision for the school. The school has continued to improve since the previous inspection; in particular standards are higher and teaching is better. The headteacher sets the tone around the school, talking to staff and students and listening to them with interest; he is a role model for the type of open dialogue that he wishes to see in school. The initiatives he has introduced, for example specialist arts college status, Artsmark Gold, Investors in Careers, Healthy Schools award and Sportsmark status have had significant effect in taking the school forward. These initiatives have led to clear improvement of the learning environment. As a result it is a popular and over subscribed school.

Governance

79. The governors are very effective and aware of many of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, governors have not ensured that the school complies with all statutory requirements. Governors are very supportive of the headteacher and leadership group. They are well informed about developments within education. Governors are clearly keen to hold the school to account. For example, they have introduced a Quality Enhancement Committee to review and evaluate the school's results and other features of which governors have information. This is part of a successful governing body committee structure. However, in some areas, notably the quality of teaching, governors are heavily reliant on the information given them by the headteacher. They are justifiably proud of the school's award of specialist arts college status. Governors have played a full strategic role in the creation of the school's development and improvement plan with its strong emphasis on the continuing improvement of quality assured teaching and learning. However, the plan does not indicate in detail what needs improving and how this should be achieved. A paper attached to the plan entitled 'Standards and Expectations' suggests that lesson observation plays a part, but there is no detail of how what happens in the classroom is to be evaluated and supported.

Management

80. The leadership group has a strong commitment to the school's development and improvement plan. Most are keen to manage and implement new initiatives. However, in some instances, the group's monitoring and evaluation of the work of subject departments lacks rigour and consistency. Strategies to improve teaching and learning further are not sufficiently systematic. For example, at present there is an unstructured approach to observing teaching outside of the performance management process and there are insufficient opportunities for the best teaching to inspire, influence and help to improve teaching as a whole, both within and across departments. There is a shared vision for all students to achieve well and management with pastoral responsibilities identifies under-achieving students and helps to ensure that they do their best. Management of students' behaviour at lunchtimes and during breaks is inconsistent. Consequently, a minority of students who have not acquired habits of self-discipline through other aspects of the school's provision behave at times in an unacceptable manner. Some aspects of management are good. The oversight of the building programme, for example, has ensured that the school's requirements are met as much as possible and good value for money has been achieved.

81. In its bid for specialist arts college status, the school made a commitment that heads of arts subjects would monitor teaching and learning through classroom observation. Each department, at agreed intervals, produces a 'self-evaluation report'. This is intended to be monitored by a member of the leadership group. This is happening in the arts; it certainly is in drama and theatre studies. Teachers frequently observe each other teaching, teach and plan collaboratively, see themselves at all times as learners as well as teachers and improve each other's daily practice as a result. This practice is one model that could be considered by all departments so that observation of teaching becomes less pragmatic and more systematic. The school is committed to being a constantly improving organisation. In many of its functions it clearly is successful in this. However, governors and managers do not have a detailed knowledge of exactly how good or otherwise teaching is, department by department or year by year. Weaker teaching, for example in Years 7 to 9, will not improve unless a systematic check is kept on teaching and learning through more frequent and focused observation. In the spirit of professional monitoring and support – 'let's do the best job we can' – and not one of negative policing; this is a feature of a very good school. Arts college status brings with it a requirement to spread creative and imaginative teaching across the curriculum. The school's involvement in the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education associates itself with a similar agenda for improvement of teaching and learning. Governors have a responsibility to seek detail from management of the processes undertaken to meet the obligations embedded in the specialist school requirements and its mission statement in relation to teaching and learning across the curriculum. A stated aim is 'to maximise achievement and create new opportunities for all students...to permeate the whole curriculum'.
82. The special educational needs co-ordinator has created a good working ethos amongst her team and is making an influential contribution to the whole school. She is showing herself to be knowledgeable and capable of taking initiatives based on sound judgements. She is thoughtful and then plans new responses efficiently.
83. Very good procedures are in place for the induction of new staff. Newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school are given very good support and a very well planned professional development programme has been developed to support them.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3 331 632	Balance from previous year	172 046
Total expenditure	3 401 496	Balance carried forward to the next	102 182
Expenditure per student	2 654		

84. The school receives a considerably lower amount of income for each student than the average for secondary schools. The school provides very good value for money at moderate cost because students achieve well as a result of good teaching and the school has very good leadership. The school carefully matches expenditure to its identified priorities and has good procedures, including tendering, to ensure that goods and services are provided in accordance with the principles of best value. It consults widely to seek to meet the needs of the community it serves.
85. The governing body includes a member with financial expertise and this knowledge is put to good use, challenging proposed expenditure proposals to seek to ensure that monies are spent in a manner which best meets students' needs. Expenditure is well linked to the school's development plan.

86. Money is properly accounted for and the small number of issues identified in the most recent audit of accounts has been successfully dealt with.

Sixth form

Leadership and management of the sixth form are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a commitment to providing an excellent education and equal opportunities for all students.
- The very successful pastoral team provides advice, support and guidance of high quality.
- Curriculum leadership and management are good overall and very good in mathematics, health and social care, ICT, psychology and theatre studies.
- Not all subjects have examination targets to enable subject performance to be systematically tracked.

Commentary

87. All of the previously mentioned qualities of the school's leadership apply to the sixth form, although the sixth form leader's role is not as broad as that of members of the leadership group. The sixth form is very successful, popular and has grown steadily over the last few years. It provides equal access to a very wide variety of courses for all the students who meet its minimum entry requirements; it is almost open-access. The sixth form is cost-effective.
88. The leadership group is effective in establishing a rich sixth-form curriculum. The role of head of the sixth form is essentially managing pastoral care; he plays an important part in liaising with other schools and institutions of further and higher education. His leadership provides a clear sense of purpose and direction. His team of two assistants, 14 tutors and a part-time administrative assistant work together efficiently and provide very good support, advice and guidance for students. Checking students' progress and personal development is very effective. However, similar checking of subject performance is less rigorous and is one reason why the results in some subjects are below average and some students under-achieve.
89. The governors are aware of the strong and weaker features of the sixth form and are very effective in their role as critical friends. However, they have yet to fulfil their statutory duty to ensure the provision of religious education and a daily collective act of worship.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were only at the national average although students had entered the school with above average attainment.
- Work seen in Years 10 and 11 is well above average, reflecting the results in the 2003 national tests for Year 9 that were well above average.
- Students learn very well in Years 10 and 11 because teachers focus strongly on raising standards.
- Very effective leadership and good management drive standards forward.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Good	
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good	

Commentary

90. Results in the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. Results have varied over the last three years but they have always been above average.
91. Some students in Years 7 to 9 reach a high standard. They adapt their writing to suit different purposes and analyse poetry perceptively. They read 'Macbeth' aloud with excellent expression. Although low attainers make spelling and grammar mistakes, the reader can understand what they write. Standards of speaking are well above average. In one lesson students used 'rationalise', 'cynical' and 'authoritative' correctly. Students who have special educational needs make good progress because of the good individual help they receive. Teachers are effective with all students and as a result students achieve well and this is reflected in well above average results in tests.
92. Results in the GCSE examination in English and English literature in 2003 were in line with the national average. This did not meet expectations, given students' attainment on entry. In the previous two years English results were above average but English literature results were average.
93. The best work in Years 10 and 11 is of a high standard. The writing style of the highest attainers shows a high level of maturity as in: '...it mixes a slightly formal tone with the technique of assertion'. This is a developed writing skill required at this level. Analysis of literature is very detailed as in studies of the way Conan Doyle portrays Watson in the 'Sherlock Holmes'

stories. Most students write fluently although they make technical errors that are sometimes basic. An average-attaining group understood and explained orally the bias in a newspaper article. The writing skills of the lower attainers are limited but they communicate soundly. Overall, teaching is very effective and students' achievement is good, standards being closer to those found in 2001 and 2002 examinations.

94. The enthusiasm that teachers have for their subject is evident. They encourage students constantly and are ready to praise good work. Consequently students work hard in class and achieve well. Lessons are well planned and teachers often follow the national governmental initiatives in Years 7 to 9. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on 'Macbeth' students highlighted phrases in one of Macbeth's speeches, watched a short clip from a video, annotated the speech and began to write an essay from the viewpoint of the director. The teacher made sure that students concentrated on providing evidence from the text for their comments. Lower-attaining students were quietly given extra guidance. At the end of the lesson students reviewed what they had learned and this consolidated their achievement.
95. In Years 10 and 11, in particular, lessons are closely focused on the learning objectives and teachers challenge students to do their best and achieve well. They frequently point out to students what they need to do to obtain the highest GCSE grades. Teachers mark the work of all students very conscientiously. Comments on work are designed to show students how to improve. Students know how well they are doing but in some cases comments are not sufficiently targeted on improving GCSE grades.
96. There is a very clear sense of purpose in the department as is seen in the action plan, which is sharply focused on raising standards. To this end there are many good systems in place such as the method of reviewing students' work. However, some systems such as the checking of teaching throughout the department are not yet fully in place. Since the previous inspection teaching and departmental leadership have improved. The development plan has much improved but monitoring and support are not yet fully in place.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

97. The school makes good provision for raising standards of literacy across the curriculum. There is well-established practice in most subjects. Provision is particularly good in art and design and ICT. In both subjects there is very strong emphasis on students expanding their ideas and teachers expect high standards. In most subjects there is good emphasis on students using the correct terminology and expressing themselves clearly. It is only in religious education that provision is poor. The library is a good resource and the librarian has been very imaginative in making it more attractive to readers. Consequently it is well used and the numbers of books borrowed is increasing. Overall standards are good.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attitudes and relationships with teachers promote students' learning.
- A lack of variety in some teaching restricts students' achievement.
- The range of curriculum experiences, including visits abroad, offers students good opportunities to enhance their learning.
- Monitoring of teaching, the use of assessment and of data is not rigorous enough to raise standards.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of assessment	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good Satisfactory Satisfactory	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

98. Assessments by teachers at the end of Year 9 show students are attaining broadly in line with national averages. GCSE results in French and German have been consistently well above average in recent years. This is the result of a late focus on examination technique that successfully raised standards that are reflected in the 2003 GCSE results. Substantial numbers of lower-attaining students have, until 2003, followed a short course GCSE examination syllabus.
99. Year 9 students reach a good standard in reading and listening in textbook-based exercises and can often infer meaning of new words. Training in the use of dictionaries is effective as they spontaneously use glossaries to check their understanding. They acquire a good knowledge of the mechanics of language and manipulate structures accurately on grammar worksheets. Opportunities to apply their writing in more practical contexts are fewer as topic-based work does not receive enough emphasis and there is insufficient focus on developing oral skills. Broadly similar strengths and weaknesses are evident in Year 11 work. In Years 10 and 11, good standards in reading and listening are supported through practice of revision papers and students in French use spider diagrams effectively to structure their ideas in preparation for course-work.
100. Students' attainment on entry is average and their achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Standards are higher in French than German, as French is more consistently established as the language for students' learning. In all years students' positive attitudes contribute to their achievement as they are quickly on task, concentrate and listen carefully to explanations. When the opportunity arises they respond well to teachers' questioning. However, teaching lacks the spark and variety of approaches to raise students' achievement sufficiently to raise standards further. Students take pride in the presentation of written work, but they do not perform as well in modern languages as they show themselves to be capable of performing in other subjects they take. Although ICT is used, there is insufficient access to computers to support learning as much as is desirable and bring more variety of teaching to learning.
101. Teachers are competent linguists, relate well to students and provide them with good encouragement and informal guidance. Some enterprising techniques are used. For example in Year 9 Spanish, students devise very attractive 'estate agents' brochures to provide information on houses, and in both French and Spanish teachers have used their own ICT skills to adapt learning to students' needs. Such good practice is not widely shared. The basis for productive oral work is not firmly established and teaching is too closely centred on the discussion and practice of formal grammar or written textbook exercises. This results in students working at different speeds, slows the pace of lessons, prevents teachers from gaining an overview of learning and reduces the effectiveness of both assessment and evaluations at the ends of lessons.
102. The curriculum leader works energetically to provide leadership and continuity for the school's wide and complex provision for languages. Leadership strives hard to raise and improve students' standards further amongst the team of teachers in the department. A good team

ethos exists, with responsibilities widely delegated and the contributions of capable foreign language assistants are effectively managed. There is a shared commitment to varied, long-standing exchange programmes. The strengths outlined in the previous report have been maintained but although the strong features of leadership now outweigh some shortcomings in developing more variety in teaching, weaknesses relating to methodology, assessment and use of data and developmental planning remain.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11.
- Achievement is good because of good teaching and the good attitudes of students.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to use computers to help learning.
- Teaching is not monitored well enough to ensure that there is a focus on improving standards to match the very best.
- Very good leadership provides a clear vision for improving standards further.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Good Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

103. In 2003, results in the Year 9 national tests were well above average and improved significantly on those of the previous year. In relation to their earlier learning results were above average. Results in the Year 11 GCSE examinations were similar. These results represent good achievement for these students.
104. In the work seen, standards matched the previous years' results. In Year 9 the highest-attaining students can convert numbers into standard form and use them well when dealing with problems involving large and small numbers. Algebraic skills are being developed well and students can identify patterns and find rules confidently in investigations. Booster classes are provided for students whose overall performance is below average; these have led to improved achievement. By the end of Year 11 the highest-attaining students understand trigonometric functions and can apply them confidently to solving problems involving lengths and angles. Students demonstrate good data-handling skills in their GCSE course-work projects; they represent data effectively with a variety of graphical methods and can use a range of measures to analyse their results.
105. Students' achievement is good. The excellent knowledge of teachers ensures that new skills and concepts are clearly explained. Skilful questioning involves students well and provides opportunities for students to share ideas and strategies with each other. As a result, good

progress is made in lessons with students understanding of new skills. Test and examination criteria provide a clear focus for learning in many lessons. Teachers plan well for lessons; they provide a range of activities which challenge and motivate students but not enough opportunities are given to students to use computers to support their learning. The mathematics strand of the national initiative in Years 7 to 9 is being implemented well and is having a significant effect on raising students' attainment. A good range of starter activities are used at the beginning of lessons to create students' interest and develop mental and oral skills although the time at the end of lessons is not always given sufficient attention to check students' learning. Students' progress is assessed regularly and they understand how well they are doing. Comments in books, however, do not always provide sufficient information for students about what they need to do to improve.

106. The curriculum leader has a clear vision for improving standards further. Students' performance is well analysed and evaluated and acted upon. Clarity of purpose has been established with other members of the department and there is a clear commitment by all to improvement. Good provision has been made for different groups of students so that their needs are well catered for. Teaching is not checked often enough to ensure that good practice is shared between teachers, so that all teaching can strive to match the very best. Improvements since the previous inspection have been good; teaching, planning for the subject's development and opportunities for students to evaluate their own learning are now good although further improvement can still be made in using computers further to support learning and monitoring of teaching. Since the previous inspection standards and achievement have improved in Years 10 and 11.

Mathematics across the curriculum

107. The contribution made to students' numeracy skills by other subjects is satisfactory. Teachers have been made aware of the government's initiative at Years 7 to 9 and approaches that are being used in mathematics. A school policy is in place and a teacher has responsibility for supporting its application across the school. Those subjects where numeracy is an integral part of the course have responded effectively to the policy and have identified opportunities to support students' numeracy skills in their lesson planning. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson on radioactivity, students' graphical skills were well supported by the teacher.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards throughout the age range are well above average.
- Good teaching and learning leads to good achievement.
- Very good relationships and classroom management ensure a positive learning ethos.
- Checks on the quality of teaching are not frequent or rigorous enough.
- Marking of written work does not give students sufficient information on how to improve their work.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good Satisfactory Satisfactory	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

108. Results have improved over the last few years. In 2003, in the national test at age 14 results were above average, GCSE results were well above average. When compared to students' prior attainment this represents good achievement.
109. Overall, teaching is good and just under half the lessons seen were very good. Lessons are well planned and organised. They are clearly structured, with a variety of tasks that involve students in learning through taking part in practical activities. Teaching is enthusiastic, capturing students' interest well. Teachers use their subject expertise to good effect in communicating scientific concepts clearly in language students can easily understand. Students are generally challenged to think about their science. In a Year 8 lesson on sound, students experimented with a sonometer and with tubes filled with varying amounts of water. Throughout the lesson the teacher's skilful questioning made students formulate hypotheses, discuss variables and build on their previous knowledge. They gained a deeper understanding of the scientific method of working. Students were well motivated and worked hard, achieving well.
110. Teachers manage their classes very well and insist on high standards of work and behaviour. They are encouraging and supportive, boosting students' confidence. As a result students have a positive attitude to science and want to do well. In Year 9, students undergo a comprehensive programme of revision, which helps to enhance their achievement. Students' investigative skills are good and are developed in a systematic way. Higher-attaining students in Year 11 can describe and interpret patterns in their results and evaluate their reliability. Lower-attaining students find it difficult to use their scientific knowledge to explain the patterns and lack accuracy when recording measurements.
111. In a few lessons in the lower school teachers do not match resources and activities well enough to meet the learning needs of different groups of students. Where tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels, the higher-attaining students are not sufficiently challenged and, in consequence, make insufficient progress. Sometimes the aims of the lesson are not shared with students, resulting in an initial lack of focus. Opportunities are also sometimes missed to review the lesson objectives at the end of the lesson to give both teacher and students an assessment of what has been learnt.
112. Marking of written work does not motivate students since there are few comments showing where more depth or detail is required. It does not increase students' knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. In some lessons the pace of learning is too slow and students do not make as much progress as expected. The national strategy in Years 7 to 9 is used to good effect in many lessons, leading to better-planned and more focused teaching. The use of ICT to enhance learning is insufficiently developed by some teachers.

113. The new head of department is committed to improving students' achievement and is beginning to implement strategies to this end. The grouping of students and schemes of work have been reviewed and a Thinking Skills course introduced. Standards and the quality of teaching have improved since the previous inspection but several issues raised in that report have not yet been resolved adequately. These are the identification of learning objectives, marking, the use of lesson assessment to plan learning tasks, and the clear focus on improving learning in development planning. Technicians' hours are still inadequate. There is insufficient sharing of good practice leading to inconsistency across the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because expectations are high.
- Standards by Year 11 are well above the national average.
- Very informative comment lets students know exactly how well they are doing and how to make further improvement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students.
- Very good provision is made for the highest achieving students who take A-level in Years 10 and 11.
- Students become very confident, independent learners through using ICT.
- There is a very clear vision of how the subject contributes to learning.
- Teachers cannot plan lessons as well for students in Year 7 because the school does not receive enough information from primary schools.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Very good	
Improvement since the previous inspection	Very good	

Commentary

114. On entry to Year 7, students' standards vary greatly but are below average overall. However, very little information on exactly what each student has learnt by that age is received by the school. This makes planning of appropriate work more difficult for teachers and explains why students achieve more in later years. By Year 9 nearly all students have a very good sense of how to present their work for the intended audience. The highest attaining students use HTML code to produce their own web-sites. These students will take GCSE two years early and so are very well challenged. In 2003 almost every student gained a grade C or above at GCSE or an equivalent examination with over a quarter of entries gaining the highest grade. Work seen during the inspection shows that these standards are being maintained. The highest-attaining students take A-level whilst in Years 10 and 11. This very good provision ensures that these students sustain and develop their interest in the subject. At all ages, boys and girls achieve equally well. Standards are much higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

115. Teaching stimulates students to learn. They develop a mature approach to their work because they are encouraged to take charge of their own learning. For example, Year 9 students enjoyed producing high-quality logos for a theatre company exploring a drawing program that was new to them. In many lessons students develop not only their ICT skills but also learn about wider issues. In a very good lesson, Year 10 students were enthralled by the story of how a 19-year-old student devised a lighting system that later became the basis of modern computer storage. Students enjoy examining issues such as the way technology transforms lives, for good or ill, and readily not only express their views but challenge those with whom they disagree in a most mature manner.
116. Very informative comment ensures that students know exactly what progress they are making in relation to the very high yet realistic expectations set. Students are skilled in assessing their own work, developing their skill using detailed booklets written by teachers. They also appreciate the benefits of asking other students to be involved in evaluating their work. This was seen to good effect when Year 9 students asked others in their class to comment upon the slide shows they had produced to advertise a concert.
117. Leadership and management are of better quality than at the time of the previous inspection. This is the prime reason for the improvements made since that date. The leadership has a very clear view not just of the subject but also ensures it makes a major contribution to the education of the whole person. Although nearly all students in Years 10 and 11 choose to take an examination course in ICT, careful planning and monitoring ensures that the few who do not choose such a course learn the topics required by the National Curriculum.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

118. The school has more computers than normally found in a school of this size. These computers are well maintained by a team of skilled technicians, ensuring that teachers can rely upon computers working when they plan to use them in their lessons. All teachers have laptop computers. This facilitates planning of work using ICT. Students have very good levels of competence and so teachers can use ICT without concern as to whether students will have the required levels of skills.
119. Great benefit is gained through using computers in subjects such as electronics, where ICT usage helps students enormously with circuit designs and business studies where students carry out extensive research from the Internet. Students in Years 7 and 8 spend one of their English lessons each fortnight working at computers. However, the school acknowledges that it does not yet have enough computers so that all teachers can regularly use ICT to help learning. Whilst using computers at times, subjects which need to make greater use of ICT include modern foreign languages, mathematics, science, design and technology and physical education.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching enables students in Years 7 to 9 to achieve well.
- Departmental leadership does not do enough to ensure that the best practice in teaching is shared.
- Good support for students with special educational needs enables them to achieve very well.

- There are too few opportunities for fieldwork and the use of ICT.

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Satisfactory
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of assessment	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Good	Satisfactory
Quality of curriculum leadership	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Satisfactory	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

120. Results in the teacher-assessed tests at the end of Year 9 were overestimated as well above average. Work seen in Years 9 during the inspection was of a lower standard, though still above average. Both the 2003 GCSE results and standards seen in Year 11 were in line with national averages.
121. Students enter the school with a varied experience of geography and with broadly average levels of knowledge and understanding. In Years 7 to 9 they develop basic skills of map-reading and interpretation and improve their knowledge of the location of places. They record information in maps, graphs and diagrams and use vocabulary accurately in descriptive and explanatory writing. The majority draw and link evidence from a range of sources to support conclusions and attain the higher National Curriculum levels. The limited opportunities for independent research, such as Year 9 investigations into earthquakes, are used to produce very well organised and presented projects, often with the aid of ICT. Given their starting point, the progress made by the majority of students by the end of Year 9 represents good achievement. Girls and boys achieve equally well. Students with special educational needs achieve very well because they are given materials and tasks well matched to their capabilities and receive good individual support and help from teachers. In Years 10 and 11 students show good recall of factual knowledge and understanding of ideas in responding to examination style questions. The quality of their fieldwork is high but performance in written examinations is restricted by underdeveloped practical, thinking and decision-making skills.
122. Teaching is good overall, with the best practice in Years 7 to 9. Students learn well when lessons have clear objectives, a variety of activities offering increasing levels of challenge and probing questioning to assess and extend what they know. A particular strength is that teachers form good relationships with their students, know them well and give them good support through individual attention and suitable materials. Almost all students respond with positive attitudes, hard work and good behaviour; they work co-operatively with teachers and each other. However, this good practice is not applied consistently. In Years 10 and 11 particularly, there is some lack of variety in teaching style and method, with students too often engaged on routine tasks to interpret written information.
123. Leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory. There are no clear strategies to improve and raise the profile of the subject, particularly in making it more popular with girls. The focus of development planning is on the acquisition of resources rather than raising achievement through consistently good teaching across the department. Some progress has been made in developing more suitable schemes of work for Years 7 to 9, but the lack of off-site work and opportunities for ICT remain a weakness in curriculum planning. Assessment procedures are now more reliable in producing accurate information and some progress has been made in target-setting and monitoring student progress. The department is managed efficiently on a day-to-day basis and the good provision of accommodation and resources has a positive effect

on learning. However, monitoring and evaluating the work of the department, especially teaching, is an area for further development.

124. Better GCSE results and improved achievement, especially that of girls, represent satisfactory progress since the previous inspection

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons have clear aims and purposes so students learn effectively.
- Teachers carefully plan lessons to support new learning.
- Leadership and management of history are very good.
- A good range of resources encourages students to learn independently.
- Good use is made of extra-curricular visits to enrich teaching and learning.
- A small minority of students has difficulty with writing exercises.
- Disruptive behaviour of a minority inhibits some learning.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Very good Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

125. The 2003 GCSE results were well above the national average. The percentages of students attaining the higher A* and A grades, A* to C grades and A* to G grades were all well above average. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Results over the previous three years have been average or better. Standards seen during the inspection are average in Year 7 rising to above average in Year 9. This represents good achievement. Broadly, standards in Years 10 and 11 were above average and represent good achievement. Teaching and learning have become sharper this year. The language of history is understood and used by students and they use it effectively. However, too often it is weakened by careless grammar and spelling. Students understand the importance of examining cause and consequence and they can amass an amount of information that is generally well organised. For example, students can discuss the relative value of evidence from official statistics and political cartoons. Girls and boys present their work in an organised fashion. This is one reason why they do so well. Their skill in filing and retrieving information is good. Girls are more confident speakers and attentive listeners. The higher-attaining students show confidence in their analysis and interpretation of research data on historical events or people. The lower-attaining students show some weaknesses in both evaluation and the presentation of data. The differing learning needs of students are carefully considered and appropriate learning activities are provided for the lower-attaining students and those deemed to be gifted and talented. Girls occasionally do better than boys because they produce work of a higher standard when analysing complex texts. Many boys are equally enthusiastic about history. The higher-attaining

students in Years 10 and 11, boys and girls, attain at above the national average and, thus, achieve well. Students perform well because they are both conscientious and enthusiastic.

126. Very good lessons are flexible and challenging and meet the needs of all students, particularly the higher-attaining students, who consequently do not lose interest. Learning is very effective and achievement is good. Teachers have a good rapport with students. Their knowledge is good and underpins learning and lends clarity to the history arguments held in class. Lessons are well planned and good use is made of historical journals and, when available, computers which allow students to extend their knowledge. Teachers provide logical explanations, which helps lower-attaining students to grasp historical changes of enormous significance such as the First World War. Computers to gather data are well used in the teaching and learning. This effective use prevents the lack of motivation on the part of students in tackling independent study.
127. Students respond well in classrooms and demonstrate mature attitudes when questioned about political, social or economic changes that have taken place in the past. The higher-attaining students show a greater clarity in their thinking in discussion than they do in their writing. This is because they read more widely in journals and newspapers to glean facts than most other students. Too many students however, are passive recipients of handouts and prepared notes.
128. Teachers work well together in the chasing of students' work and their evaluation of students' performance is rigorous. There is a clear vision of the development of the subject and the target reviews have meaning and substance that leads to greater achievement by students. Teachers regularly seek to develop their expertise in order to enhance teaching and learning. There has been good improvement in leadership skills that ensures maximum benefit from effective team working. For example, meticulous planning and the development of support mechanisms facilitate innovative teaching methods. Teachers in history give students good advice on gathering information from books and the Internet. There is an appropriate focus on the use of correct terminology. Research activities help students to build up their language skills. Teaching has improved well since the previous inspection; as a result, by Year 11 students' standards and achievement are better than they were in 1998.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Currently, there is no active, substantive leadership of the department owing to the long-term illness of the head of department.
- Standards are not high enough and students are under-achieving.
- The curriculum in Year 10 and 11 does not meet statutory requirements since there is insufficient time to teach the locally agreed syllabus.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Below average	Well below average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Unsatisfactory	Poor
Attitudes of students to their work	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of teaching	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Effectiveness of assessment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of learning	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very poor Very poor Poor	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

129. The striking feature of the department is that, despite some conscientious work by two short-term contract teachers, the provision of religious education is unsatisfactory because of the lack of stable leadership and management owing to the long-term absence of the head of department. The school is in the process of recruiting a permanent second teacher suitable to the needs of the school to tackle the difficulties arising from the current extended absence of the head of department. At the time of the inspection this appointment was not in place. These features are having far-reaching repercussions on standards, achievement and teaching in the subject. Moreover, linking religious education to citizenship in Year 10 prevents sufficient time being available to fully cover the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. However, this was not an arbitrary decision, but a damage-limitation one. Available permanent teaching resources were placed where they would do most good and the citizenship curriculum embraced what religious education components it sensibly could. The school is confident that this situation will be resolved by the start of the next academic year.
130. Although no students have been entered for the full GCSE course in recent years, in 2003 of 13 students who were entered for the short course, 63 per cent attained the higher A* - C grades and almost a third attained the highest A* or A grades. Other students were successful in the school's internal certificate of achievement course. Since January 2004 seven students in Year 11 have opted to study for the short GCSE examination with a diligent teacher who is on a two-term contract. Generally, however, the standards of work seen in students' folders in Years 10 and 11 are well below the national average. The timetable is such that the subject is only taught on a fortnightly basis and in Year 10 it has generally been subsumed into citizenship with certain minor links to religious education. In Years 7 to 9 students are taught from the locally agreed syllabus but the standards obtained are usually lower than those expected. At present students seldom grapple with difficult religious issues and questions rigorously enough. It is evident from the scrutiny of previous work that students do not produce work to a standard comparable with that which they produce in other subjects. The achievement of boys and girls is equally unsatisfactory.
131. The short-term contract teachers have the disadvantage of not having a head of department to guide them in the expectations of the school and the means and resources of achieving these. Although a conscientious attitude is apparent the acute uncertainties regarding established procedures makes teaching difficult for them. Teaching in one lesson seen during the inspection was very good; other lessons were satisfactory apart from one that was unsatisfactory. Despite some effective teaching, without a purposeful leader this is difficult to maintain. For example, the assessment policy is not consistently applied and available resources to enhance learning in the subject were not apparent during the inspection. The use of religious artefacts to stimulate interest and increased awareness of different faiths is rare. Teaching methods, such as the use of ICT, that require long-term planning are difficult to consider. Although some lessons were seen that met the requirements, there is little evidence of the specific needs of gifted and talented students and those with special educational needs being considered.

132. The teaching overall is not good enough to produce effective learning or for students to achieve as well as they should. The management of students is not always effective; they are bored and lessons do not touch their imagination and interest. Some lessons are carried out at too leisurely a pace without high enough expectations of students. The attitude of students is directly related to the quality of teaching. When teaching occasionally is effective, the importance and effects of sharp lesson objectives in respect of knowledge, understanding and skills is realised. Teaching which is well paced and varied immediately reaps the response of positive students' attitudes and enthusiastic work. Students benefit from an annual visit to Northumberland, part of which includes a visit to Durham Cathedral. Students find this awe-inspiring.
133. There is insufficient time for the subject and leadership is non-existent. In these circumstances improvement is difficult. At present, teaching, standards and achievement are not as good as they were deemed to be in 1998.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Year 11.
- Teaching is very good in Year 11 and as a result learning and achievement are also very good.
- Students know what to do to improve. This is a direct result of the very good assessment methods used.
- The relationship between students and teachers makes for a very productive environment.
- Students have very positive attitudes to work. They are well motivated. This has a positive effect on their learning.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Very good
Quality of learning	Good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Very good Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

134. The standard of current work seen in Year 9 is above average. Students enter the school in Year 7 with different experiences of design and technology; their levels of attainment overall are average in this subject. In Year 9 they make consistent, well-paced progress. They have good isometric drawing skills in resistant materials technology; in food technology they write good product specifications. In all subject strands they show confidence in communicating their design ideas by writing, drawing and labelling techniques. They are skilful in handling small tools when making products.

135. GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above the national average. In Years 10 and 11 students are challenged by the demanding nature of the problems in the different subjects. Higher-attaining students respond positively and produce consistently high quality work. Very good circuit design and development in electronic products and very good product development in food technology show students at their best. Students fully evaluate what they are doing and how their work can be improved. As a result achievement is very good.
136. The teachers' very effective and constructive assessment methods help students understand what they must do to improve. Lessons are effectively planned. The objectives for design and make are firmly rooted in planning in Years 7 to 9. Learning objectives are clear. Students know and understand what is expected of them. In lessons, teachers constantly challenge students' understanding of what they are learning. Students respond positively. In a Year 7 class for example, when considering how to mark out and shape metals accurately, the class was constantly challenged to think about what was involved. As the lesson progressed they began to realise the importance of accuracy in measuring. They also became much more confident in using metalworking techniques. Consequently they became more confident in their technical understanding. The achievement of students was good in the lesson.
137. Similarly in Year 9 in resistant materials technology, teaching is constantly challenging. All have to think very hard. For higher attaining students the graphic techniques needed for isometric projections are developed through challenging work demanding high levels of skill. Some find the setting out of construction lines hard to achieve. However, as a result of the teachers' expert knowledge and the very good relationships, students achieve well. Students are pleased with the good standards they reach.
138. There are very high expectations of all students. Relationships are very good between students and teachers. In Years 10 and 11, for example, this provides a productive environment in which students confidently show their skills in manufacturing. In a Year 10 lesson, students were highly motivated and talked enthusiastically about selection criteria for final designs. There was a good exchange of ideas between students and teacher. Ideas were questioned and expanded. Learning about the production of a final design idea was very good. Similarly in a Year 11 textile technology lesson, students worked purposefully on the completion of practical course-work. Standards were above average. There was a high level of concentration as students discussed the difficulties of handling some materials. Consequently as a result of consistently good teaching achievement was good. These high expectations are seen across all strands of design and technology in teachers' comments for improvement in course-work folders.
139. In the 18 months in which the head of department has been in post, significant initiatives have been put in place. Strategic planning is very effective through a very good departmental development plan and methods of assessment have been implemented very effectively.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The school is organised to maintain an overview of its arts provision within the brief of its specialist college status and the terms of Artsmark Gold. Common strands of arts learning are emphasised and connections made across the arts. A community arts worker is effective in arranging for arts activities to be taken out into the community and for professional artists to be part of the school's overall provision.

A Year 7 dance lesson was sampled. The overall standard of work was average and teaching, learning and achievement were good. The lesson moved at a good pace, students were involved in choice within the activities of the lesson and were encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well.
- Standards of work are above average for students of all ages.
- Students learn effectively from well-structured lessons.
- All aspects of assessment support teaching and learning effectively.
- There is not enough formal monitoring of teaching and learning.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Good Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

140. For the relatively small number of students who took the GCSE examination in 2003 the proportion of students gaining the higher grades A*-C was well above the national average. This has been the trend over recent years. All students achieved well over the two-year course.
141. Standards have been maintained at an above average level since the previous inspection. Work seen from students in the present Year 11 confirms that standards remain above average. Students have studied the abstract compositions of Wassily Kandinsky. Line, colour and shape have been manipulated in a convincing way to achieve a well above average standard with the final outcome. The very good preparation seen in students' sketchbooks is annotated extensively and technical language develops well.
142. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement for the students in relation to when they started at school in Year 7, including those students with special educational needs. These standards are reached because students understand what they have to attain from the clear lesson objectives in well-structured lessons. For example, students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of symbolism in Aboriginal art.
143. A strong feature of the most effective teaching is the high level of challenge set for students. Teachers have high expectations of what students are capable of learning. When students express their personal interests the results are very positive. This was seen in a Year 10 project in which students were making 'boxes' in the style of Joseph Cornell. Students reflected on the concept of individuality and how to best express this in visual form. Assessment supports learning very well. Teachers mark work regularly and keep comprehensive records. Teachers make accurate summative level and grade judgements and check students' achievement. Targets are set and through a tutorial style of teaching students are told how to improve so that they achieve them. Observational drawing plays an insufficient part in students' overall development in art. The use of ICT as an aid to learning is satisfactory as a result of the acquisition of five computers. Attitudes of students are usually positive and behaviour is generally good. Class management is usually firm but on occasions it lacks the effectiveness required to deal with a small disaffected minority, mainly boys.

144. Few boys choose art and design as an optional subject but the department is tackling this by making changes to the programme of work offered. The head of subject is involved in a voluntary local education authority assessment for learning programme to improve the achievement of students taking art and design. Teachers freely express their gratitude for the help, guidance and support they receive from the head of subject to improve their teaching and assessment skills. The detailed analysis of examination results leads to developments in curriculum and teaching which contributes to maintaining above average standards. The formal monitoring of teaching and learning is insufficient to spread the good practice observed and drive up standards further. The workload of the head of subject is excessive. The administration, including budgeting and managing of a large department without the opportunity to delegate responsibility, is a barrier to ongoing improvement. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, however, because the strengths and above average standards have been maintained throughout the school. Results on the GCSE short course are now well above average.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and occasionally excellent; students' achievement is very good.
- Students learn a range of dramatic conventions quickly and know how to apply them to their independent work.
- The teachers see themselves as learners and seek to share and plan their work together.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Very good Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

145. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were amongst the best in the school. Three out of four students attained the higher A*-C grades and all of a large entry passed the examination. Almost half attained the highest A* and A grades, a significant feature of the 2003 examination. Results were well above the national average and second only to those in ICT. This was the best of three good years of results;

146. Standards seen during the inspection were above average overall in Years 7 to 11. Given the varied starting point of students when they entered the school in Year 7, this represents very effective learning and very good achievement. Students' response to very good teaching is seen in the excellent attitudes they bring to drama lessons. Teachers establish a good working environment in which their expectations of very good work are constantly stated and when achieved, praised. Students respond to this demand and recognition by taking for granted that they should always strive to produce their best work. They evaluate their own work and that of

other rigorously but with generosity and a sense of support. They know they are working with teachers who know their subject well and who want students to be successful. Teachers also want students to share their own enthusiasm for the dramatic experience; this is a feature of the rich climate for learning. Of course, not all students respond to this quality immediately; some are slow to realise its strengths. In these instances, teachers are skilful in making reasonable demands on students and when things do click into place are lavish yet sincere in their praise.

147. From the start of Year 7, students learn about and how to use dramatic conventions – 22 in a seven-week cycle of lessons. In a lesson with very good teaching, a Year 7 class, students learned the meanings of technical terms to describe conventions, such as ‘tableau’ and ‘morphing’. In and amongst this learning they picked up the importance of stillness, eye-contact and facial expressions as they created a sequence of five tableau connected through stylised movement / morphing in 8-bar sequences of recorded music. This required dramatic discipline and control that these young students managed very effectively. The teacher expected them to do well, so they did. A similar approach was adopted in a more sophisticated form with Year 9 in a lesson about homelessness. In this instance, students’ feelings needed to be a part of the expression. Progression through to Year 11 is clear.

Example of outstanding practice

In an outstanding lesson with Year 11 students were required to produce a multi-media piece on the theme of war and terrorism in response to a range of photographic images.

In putting this piece together students were required to use personal responses in their own writing [previously performed as monologues], music and physical theatre. This was a very well planned and structured lesson. The teacher had used PowerPoint to cross-fade many images of atrocities of war and acts of terrorism. In a previous lesson students had written personal responses to the images and the many cultural and moral reasons that were behind them. Some performed their writing as a dramatic monologue. In this lesson, working independently in groups, students devised stylised scenes to represent collective responses. Skilful teaching used questioning to focus more firmly students’ chosen personal interpretation of real events; the teacher encouraged them to seek non-naturalistic ways of bringing their own snatches of text together into a ritual sort of chant within a sequence of large-scale movements. One group built this movement into a final tableau on many levels, each supporting each other, with the topmost boy reaching heavenwards as though making a desperate plea for release from the pain and personal hurt of such acts. Music had been chosen and was played to heighten the climax of this scene, as the projected images moved across the performers themselves, drawing them into the atrocity depicted behind them. The level of engagement of all in the group, and those watching, had an energy and intensity befitting the subject matter. Work of this quality is the result of excellent teaching based on secure knowledge of theatre and dramatic conventions. The achievement of this very mixed group in terms of their prior attainment was outstanding. They new this and the buzz they felt at the end of the lesson was evidence of their learning through excellent engagement in a very well thought-out arts process that matched students’ learning needs.

148. The enthusiastic, energetic and well-informed teaching that results in work of this quality and causes students’ achievement overall to be very good takes place in two very good drama spaces, one well-equipped with lighting and sound, the other making use of portable lighting and sound equipment. Learning is lively, effective and stretches students technically and emotionally. Teachers work together well, constantly seek to improve their practice and learn from each other. Leadership of a very good quality ensures that this is a very good department and a strength of the school. As a result, since 1998, even better teaching has led to standards and achievement being better now than at the time of the previous inspection.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Achievement in lessons is good because of good teaching and learning.
- Achievement and enthusiasm in extra-curricular bands, choirs and groups is very good.
- Very good leadership is ensuring that music is thriving in the school.
- The assessment procedure is not yet sufficiently clear to help teachers and students plan for improvement of standards.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Satisfactory Good	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

149. The new head of department's experience in the music profession and the teachers' insistence on high standards of performance both in and out of class are making a positive impact on students' enthusiasm for music in the school. Students are highly committed to music as discussions with performing arts students and choir members show. They speak of their great enjoyment of the subject and very highly of music in the school. They spoke movingly about a performance of 'Noyes Fludde' in which most of them had taken part, savouring moments in the performance. In lessons students enjoy their work; 'Look at that', a Year 7 boy was heard to say after proudly finishing his score, 'Try my latest one!'
150. Most students work hard given clear guidelines and worthwhile, challenging tasks by the teachers. Groups of students in Year 9 worked very hard to achieve a perfect performance of a minimalist exercise at speed using a variety of instruments. These musical skills are developing well because of very good feedback to individual students from teachers which explains what is good, what has improved and what still needs to be worked on. Students make good progress following this kind of intervention. They also learn from each other through frequent opportunities to listen to each other's performances and discuss the standard during good periods of class reflection. They are developing a sense of what a good performance is. In one Year 7 lesson, though, there were not enough of these opportunities. Students worked for too long on their own, unable to sustain their focus because they were inexperienced at practising their instruments. In a Year 11 lesson, students used the examination marking scheme very beneficially when listening to each other play. However this practice is new and consequently students have not planned for improving their performances systematically. In spite of this, most students achieve good standards of performance and composition at this level, borne out by the last two years GCSE results which were above average.
151. The ethos of the department, with its strong emphasis on practical music-making, is just right. The leadership has a strong vision for developing this further. The department is thriving now as a result of persistence and vision and committed teaching overall. After a period of instability the department is improving. There has been insufficient time so far to develop a coherent action plan for raising standards. Teachers do not share their differing strengths and weaknesses formally to ensure that all teaching is of the same high quality as the best. The assessment procedure is not sufficiently well formulated yet for teachers to use it consistently and

confidently and for students to use it to know their strengths and plan for improving their weaknesses. New and very good accommodation is now open and in full use.

152. As part of the performing arts status, the department has established very good links with three local primary schools. One of the teachers visits each of these schools on a weekly basis. Currently a class in one school is learning to play the African Drums and in another a very enthusiastic choir has been formed. In the lesson observed during the inspection, students in Year 5 sang a space song well and explored expressive sounds made with the voice to use in their performance of a space composition. Students really enjoyed this session, working hard and enthusiastically throughout as a result of very good teaching. Their behaviour was exemplary. The class teacher attended the lesson and is in a position through observing to continue and extend the work they are doing.

153. Standards, teaching and learning have been brought back to the level they were at the time of the previous inspection, after a period of instability. Many new extra-curricular activities have been introduced and students now have regular access to professional musicians through workshops and performances.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is consistently good, and leads to good learning.
- The attitude of students in lessons is very good. They work hard, and behave well.
- Curriculum leadership and day to day management are good.
- Data about how well students are doing are not used sufficiently when planning lessons.
- The provision and take-up of extra-curricular sporting activities are very good.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good	
Management of the department	Good	
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good	

Commentary

154. Standards at GCSE in 2003 were above average. Students did better in this subject than they did in the others taken by them. Standards seen in lessons are above average, and students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is good.

155. The balanced and well-structured programme of teaching ensures that the quality of students' learning is maintained from start to finish of their school careers. Students' attitudes to learning are very good in all years. They are enthusiastic and demonstrate a real enjoyment of the subject. Their capacity to sustain concentration is good. Relationships between teachers and their students are very good. Students are encouraged to work independently and

collaboratively, and opportunities for students to take responsibility are a common feature of the best lessons.

156. All students learn well in lessons with no significant differences in progress between girls and boys. They improve their skills in a wide range of physical activities. Standards in boys' hockey in Year 7 are rapidly improving, and girls in Year 9 are trampolining with great confidence, building routines that include swivel hips and front drop. Year 10 girls are beginning to use the backhand clear effectively in competition, and Year 11 boys deny space defensively very well in high paced conditioned games of soccer. Observing and evaluating performance against set criteria is common in the best lessons, and this encourages students to offer suggestions for improvements. Many students achieve significant success in teams and individually, gaining local, regional and national recognition. A good range of extra-curricular activities and fixtures with other schools provide many opportunities for students to extend and develop their skills.
157. Effective teaching leads directly to good learning. All teachers have secure knowledge of the subject and pay due regard to all aspects of health and safety. In the best lessons, students know what they are going to learn, and how they will be expected to do this. Teachers set challenging tasks to meet the needs of all students. They maintain a brisk pace, and work hard to raise levels of students' self-esteem. Good lessons are well planned and structured and use clear explanations and good demonstrations to ensure that good learning takes place. This also results in good achievement.
158. Not all teaching is as good as the best. Sometimes the core course in Years 10 and 11 lacks the drive of the GCSE course. A boys' badminton lesson was no better than satisfactory in its teaching so that boys did not achieve as well as they should. There is some inconsistency in the amount of time given to key activities within the minority of less successful lessons.
159. The new head of department has made some needed improvements in a short space of time. There is a clear vision for raising standards through a focus on improving the overall quality of teaching further still. The teaching staff makes a well balanced and complementary team who support each other well, and have a shared commitment to continuous improvement. The specialist staff present the students with a balanced curriculum which gives them many opportunities to gain success in a range of sporting activities. Schemes of work are improving though inconsistent in style. Regularly moderated assessments relate directly to them, and are used to check students' progress. The information they provide is not used well to inform curriculum development, or the planning of teaching. However, day-to-day assessment for learning through the way the teacher intervenes during lessons to help students achieve their best is very good. There is insufficient monitoring of learning to ensure that best practice in teaching is identified and shared. Accommodation for the increasingly large numbers of GCSE students is inadequate.
160. Since 1998, teaching has improved and led to higher standards and more consistently good achievement by students.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

One lesson was observed in Year 10 in **applied business**. Very good teaching led students to deepen their understanding of cash-flow forecasting. Students at all levels achieved very well to attain above average standards. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. One lesson in **health and social care** was seen in Year 10. Good questioning by the teacher allowed students to be knowledgeable and confident in discussing theories of motivation. Standards were average with all students achieving well.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is well taught by dedicated staff.
- Students achieve well because they are well motivated and find the subject interesting.
- Teachers of many other subjects contribute well to learning in citizenship.
- Leadership of the subject is excellent.
- Managers do not carry out enough checks on the quality of learning taking place.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 9	Year 11
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Excellent Good N/A.	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

161. Specific lessons in citizenship are provided for all years by committed staff, and the requirements of the National Curriculum are well met. The school has developed good ways of recording how well students achieve in lessons and identifies when these lessons are specifically for citizenship, or for aspects of citizenship being taught through different subjects. The methods for reporting the subject to parents are the same as for all other subjects in the school.
162. Year 7 students have a good knowledge of the attributes of friendship, and a firm grasp of how to develop their own potential. Year 8 students are beginning to investigate the world of work, budgeting and financial awareness, and issues of morality. Year 9 students are becoming familiar with improving their own study skills, with their personal rights and responsibilities, and with law and order issues. All students have a very good understanding of the ways in which democracy works. This is the result of good teaching and students achieve well and bring positive attitudes to their learning.
163. Students build successfully on the very strong foundations laid in Years 7 to 9. In Year 10, all students receive one lesson per week specifically aimed at developing them as good citizens. They actively learn about issues around capital punishment, and consideration of the community on both local and global scales. In Year 11 students come to understand the notions of the sanctity of life, values and ethics, asylum and third world debt. This contributes effectively to their spiritual, moral and cultural development.
164. All students develop a social awareness of green issues and learn the correct way to express their concerns over the effect of pollution on the environment. They work well in small groups, and are confident to put forward their views in whole-class discussions, certain that they will receive a fair and balanced hearing. Information from lessons is recorded as both individual factual responses and personal views, and as collaborative pieces of work for display.

165. Students from all years are very active participants in whole school and community based activities. This makes a very good contribution to students' social development. Students elect members of the school council and they have a strong voice in the election of prefects which strengthens the school ethos of respecting the voice of the individual. They raise significant funds for a range of worthwhile charitable initiatives, they take part with enthusiasm in sporting activities and are involved in partnership learning activities with schools in Bulgaria, Sweden and Italy. They are very active in the local community.
166. The best teaching is characterised by the quality of planning, the depth of teachers' professional knowledge and their commitment to give students the opportunity to gain a balanced view. Teachers have high expectations that students will rise to the challenges of the work they set, and the students usually do. In the main, students listen carefully to what their teachers have to say, and many make very strong intellectual and creative efforts to explore and develop the very serious ideas with which they are presented. They learn well in lessons and they make clear gains in understanding.
167. There is a very clear line of accountability for the subject, one senior manager being responsible for oversight of different aspects of teaching and learning. A dedicated team of teachers has volunteered to teach the subject. Curriculum development over several years has taken place directly as a result of well-founded evaluation of previous practice. For organisation purposes, some aspects of religious education are maintained within the citizenship curriculum. Teachers and students complete robust surveys evaluating their satisfaction with the subject. Study of many subjects also contributes significantly to the development of the students as good citizens through work that supports and enriches the core programme. There is a detailed scheme of work specific to citizenship in place, and this is continuously refined in the light of experience. Assessment procedures are integral to all of this. The school has yet to develop a reliable way of measuring whether learning is sufficiently effective. Resources are very good, staff training is effective and the curriculum is enriched through visits and the judicious use of visiting speakers.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses taken by Year 12 students in 2003

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	100	80.1	20	23.7	34	29.9
Biology	8	87.5	65.2	0	11.1	22.5	20.6
Business studies	8	87.5	76.4	37.5	16.3	38.8	26.2
Chemistry	5	100	72.7	0	13.9	24	24.1
Design and technology	1	100	74.9	0	15.1	20	25.3
Economics	5	40	73.6	20	20.1	16	26.4
English language & literature	7	100	82.9	42.9	17.5	42.9	28.7
English literature	9	100	85.9	11.1	19.1	38.9	*30.2
French	2	50	78.2	0	18.9	10	27.6
General studies	54	79.6	73.9	24.1	17.8	29.3	25.7
Geography	5	80	74.3	0	19.8	26	26.5
History	5	100	80.7	0	19.5	34	28.6
ICT	20	80	67	15	10.9	26	21.4
Mathematics	9	55.6	61.9	0	17.1	16.7	22.1
Media studies	5	80	86.4	20	23.8	30	32
Physics	4	50	68.6	0	14.4	15	22.7
Psychology	30	73	69.7	3.3	16.7	18.7	24.1
Sociology	3	100	71.8	0	18.4	33.3	25.4
Spanish	1	100	78.5	0	17.7	20	27.3
Sport studies	8	87.5	73.2	12.5	11.4	26.3	23.1
Theatre studies	2	100	86.5	50	19.6	35	30.6

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	11	100	98.6	40	50.2	90	87.5
Biology	22	100	96.4	36.4	39.2	83.6	78.6
Business studies	11	100	98.7	9.1	36.8	67.3	80.1
Business VCE	9	100	88.6	44.4	20.6	86.6	60.1
Chemistry	8	100	97.6	37.5	49	80	84.9
Design and technology	2	100	97.8	100	35	100	77.9
English language & literature	17	100	99.4	47	36.3	85.8	80.9
English literature	18	100	99.5	50	46.5	83.3	86.5
French	3	100	98.8	66.7	51.5	86.7	87.6
General studies	17	94.1	94.7	23.5	31	70.6	73.1
Geography	9	100	98.7	33.3	44.5	75.6	84
ICT VCE	1	100	87.2	0	27.9	80	64.9
Health & social care	9	81.8	93.2	22.7	22.3	61.8	63.5
History	16	100	99	56.3	44.6	91.3	84.6
ICT	38	100	95.6	44.7	24.6	85.3	69.5
Mathematics	14	92.9	96.7	71.4	55.6	94.3	88.8
Media studies	18	100	99.4	50	37.8	90	82.1
Music	2	100	98.8	0	38.9	80	81.1
Philosophy	2	50	N/a	0	N/a	20	N/a
Physics	17	94.1	96.7	17.6	44.6	68.2	81.7
Politics	7	100	N/a	28.5	N/A	65.7	N/A
Psychology	34	100	N/a	23.5	N/A	70.5	N/A
Sociology	6	100	98.2	33.3	44.3	73.3	83.6
Sport studies	9	100	98	22.2	30.9	68.9	75.2
Theatre studies	8	100	99.5	37.5	40.1	90	83.6
Travel & tourism VCE	9	100	90	11.1	19.5	62.2	62.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

In this curriculum area, English literature and German were focus subjects and English language and French were sampled. Results in A-level **English language** in 2003 were well above the national average. In the only lesson seen standards were above average, teaching was good and students were achieving well. In **French**, students were being taught effective techniques to improve the quality of their listening, reading and writing skills in preparation for the forthcoming examinations. Teaching and learning were good. All three students passed the examination last year and two gained the higher A and B grades.

English Literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well and there are some who attain very high standards.
- There was some underachievement by students in the 2003 A-level examination.
- Teachers' planning and the resources they provide help students to learn.
- Teachers' marking is very thorough and helps students to improve.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Good	
Management of the department		

Commentary

168. Students enter the A-level course with standards that are in line with the national average. In 2003 results at A-level were at the national average but there was slight underachievement by students. In the previous year results were well above average. The 2003 AS results showed good achievement by students with half of them reaching the higher grades of A and B. In work seen during the inspection students have a good grasp of the work of writers ranging from Elizabethan times to the present day.
169. Students' files show good progress throughout the course. In Years 12 and 13 the highest-attaining students produce work of a very high standard. They have a very sophisticated control of language and their analyses of texts show great perception. There are, for example, very full studies of symbolism in "The Bell Jar". Other students in Year 12 gain skills in textual analysis. They use quotations well but, although they recognise figurative language, they are less successful in identifying its effect. By Year 13 they have made further progress although the lowest-attaining students still struggle to develop answers fully. Standards in discussion are very good but some students are less successful when expressing their ideas in writing.
170. Teachers know the subject very well and this enables them to guide discussion and pick up effectively on points that students make. For example, in one lesson the teacher used an opportunity to remind students of what is meant by a feminist approach to literature. In the best lessons students are fully involved in learning independently. This was seen to good effect in a lesson on Carol Ann Duffy's "The Beast". Students worked very hard in groups and were quite

ingenious in analysing features such as the use of slang phrases, lists of famous women and fairy-tale characters. In the following full-class session, students learned well from the results of each other's findings. Students' very good attitudes and willingness to participate ensure that discussions are fruitful.

171. Teachers plan lessons well and always share with students the particular aspects of the text they will examine during the lesson. This helps students to focus their learning and encourages them to achieve well. There are many examples of resources that teachers produce which help students to learn. For example, there is a very useful 'Othello' pack which provides students with models and explains assessment objectives. Teachers mark students' work in great detail. Students say how helpful this is, especially as teachers clearly show them what they need to do to achieve higher grades. Teachers' comments focus well on A-level assessment objectives although they do not always refer to them directly.
172. The very good student retention rates reflect the good teaching and the very good relationships between teachers and students. Students appreciate the good research opportunities that exist in the school library, where the stock is above average in both quality and quantity. They also have ready access to the Internet. Students gain from the way the course is managed. For example, good use is made of statistical data and all students know their target grades and how to attain them. The department keeps accurate check on their progress and readily identifies students who are working above or below their expected level.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

173. There is good provision for literacy in the sixth form. It is particularly strong in art and design where students write descriptive pieces using an above average range of technical language. In all other subjects inspected there is plenty of good discussion. In health and social care, ICT, mathematics and physics, students gain from making oral presentations and in most subjects they are required to write at sustained length. Teachers pay due attention to ensuring that literacy standards are high enough. The library is well stocked in most subjects and students make good use of it.

German

Provision in German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attitudes help students achieve well.
- Teachers support students well in their learning.
- Occasional over-dependence on the textbook detracts from learning and results in reduced opportunities for speaking.
- Extra-curricular provision provides good opportunities to develop students' skills.
- Marking does not inform students how they can improve.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good	
Management of the department	Good	

Commentary

174. No students were entered for A-level in German in 2003. Six students were entered at AS-level. Four 'B's and two 'C's were awarded. All students are continuing to A2 and some are re-sitting modules to improve their grades.
175. There are no major differences in standards as most students in both years are working towards grades B and C. Students have a strong work ethic and interest in the subject. This is reflected in the quantity of work they get through and the evident pride they take in their work. Competence in skills is above average except for speaking which is average. Students readily understand teachers' explanations in German and note details accurately in listening exercises. Similarly, in reading, their good knowledge of vocabulary enables them to work out the sense of texts and they can often infer the meaning of unfamiliar phrases. Good training in dictionary skills ensures that they do not waste time in looking up new words. Teachers provide very good support for students in the organisation of their learning. Checklists, vocabulary lists and reference sheets that provide background information or summarise the key points of topics are used well. Effective use is made of the 'Kultur' unit to widen students' appreciation of German cultural history and encourage an interest in them to read more widely in this area. Teachers' hard work, guidance and accessibility enable students not only to improve the standard of their work but also become more independent. This also has a direct effect upon students' achievement. Most students, with the exception of the highest-attaining students in Year 12, are less confident in oral work, both in responding to teachers' questions and in expressing their ideas. Writing skills are above average but students take some time to reach that standard as the very strong focus on grammar includes time-consuming formal translation and prose-writing which result in a slower start to extended writing tasks. The highest attaining female student in Year 12 however, already possesses advanced writing skills.
176. Relationships are strong. Students have good opportunities to work with the foreign language assistant in separate sessions to develop their oral skills. In lessons, however, opportunities are missed to systematically develop their thinking and oral skills. A tendency to see the textbook as a vehicle rather than a resource for learning ensures that the pace of learning in lessons is steady rather than brisk and some activities are not sufficiently modified to prepare students effectively for mixed skill examination papers. Marking, although regular does not provide enough opportunities for students to analyse the quality of their learning.
177. Good leadership has ensured that clear direction is provided for students' learning both inside and outside the classroom. Students benefit from participation in the long-standing exchange schemes organised by the department. Although one teacher carries sole responsibility for each year group expectations and practice are consistent for students in both years.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 13 are above average.
- Teachers have an excellent knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that teachers' expertise is used well.
- Students' achievement is good because teaching is good.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to use computers to help in their learning.
- Very good relationships result in very good attitudes of students that help them achieve well.
- Assessment of students' work is good; students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Very good	

Commentary

178. In 2003, GCE A-level examination results were above average. This represents good achievement in relation to students' attainment at the start of the course. Results were similar to those of previous years.
179. Overall, standards of work seen are above average. This represents good achievement and reflects the progress students make from the start of the course, through Year 12 and into Year 13. Students make good progress in mathematics and achieve well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In pure mathematics, in Year 13, students understand well the concepts of vectors and their use in forming vector equations and can apply confidently the different rules of calculus. In Year 12, students are developing well their understanding of using the laws of logarithms to solve equations and of the 'normal distribution' and its use in questions on probability. Students following further mathematics understand well how to analyse information using a variety of statistical tests to compare data. Their projects are of a high quality.
180. Teachers are skilful when introducing new and difficult concepts; these are clearly explained. Lessons are well planned to develop students learning and ensure that achievement is good, but not enough opportunities are included so that students use computers regularly to develop their knowledge and understanding. Relationships are very good and as a result students show very positive attitudes to their work; they make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and teachers provide good support and guidance so that students overcome their difficulties and achieve well. Teachers question students well so that good links are made with students' previous learning. The day-to-day assessment of students' work is good; it supports students' learning well so that they know how well they are doing in relation to examination criteria with the result that they achieve well. A particularly good feature of the teaching is the use of presentations, prepared by students for other students, when revising topics for module tests. This gives students the opportunity to use and develop their communication skills.

181. The curriculum leader is constantly analysing the students' performance and trying to find ways in which standards can be improved. For example, setting is provided in the present Year 12 teaching groups in an attempt to raise standards even further. Teachers are deployed effectively to ensure that their specialist knowledge is used well. Teachers work well together to ensure that the progress of all students is checked and supported well.

Mathematics across the curriculum

182. Few students enter the sixth form with mathematical skills that are below average. As a result, the use of mathematics and the level of skills shown by students are very good across almost all subjects. Where students have to apply their number skills they do so confidently. In design and technology and ICT students apply their mathematical skills very well. Application of number is firmly embedded in the planning for vocational health and social care. In physics, students apply their skills well but those students who are not taking mathematics in the sixth form have difficulty with some of the calculations that they meet.

SCIENCE

The focus subject for the inspection was physics but one lesson each of biology and chemistry were sampled. In 2003, results in **biology** were above average. In the lesson seen students were learning the technique of dilution plating and demonstrated good practical skills using aseptic technique confidently. Their positive attitudes and good teaching resulted in good achievement. A-level results in **chemistry** were average. Students' learning in the lesson observed was good. They showed competent practical skills in a titration exercise. The teacher clearly explained the theory behind the practical in a structured way that enabled students to achieve well.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject are shown in clear explanations of physical concepts.
- Students' achievement in the 2003 examinations was not high enough.
- Students' positive attitudes to work are in response to supportive teacher-student relationships.
- Teaching methods sometimes do not adequately meet the learning needs of all students.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	average	above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	good	good
Attitudes of students to their work	good	good
Quality of teaching	good	good
Effectiveness of assessment	good	good
Quality of learning	good	good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Good Good N/A	
Management of the department		
Improvement since the previous inspection		

Commentary

183. In 2002 A-level and AS results were above the national average. However in 2003, results fell to below average. There was significant underachievement as results were lower than those expected from students' GCSE performance. The achievement of present students in the lessons seen is good.
184. Teachers' very good command of the subject allows them to explain new topics clearly to develop students' understanding. In the more effective lessons teachers clearly focus students' learning on the lesson objectives and how they fit in with previous and future work. In a Year 12 lesson on particle physics, students were given sets of cards representing different types of particles as soon as they arrived at the lesson. They were asked to classify the particles into groups and to decide which forces effected them. This activity effectively assessed and reinforced their learning from previous work. Students then applied their knowledge to examination questions. The teacher gave good advice on examination technique while helping students with strategies to tackle the questions. At the end of the lesson students were required to complete particle equations on individual white boards which gave an assessment of student understanding. The lesson was interesting and challenging and students were actively involved in their learning throughout the lesson and achieved very well.
185. Teaching is enthusiastic, motivating students to work hard. Homework is well used to reinforce learning. Students speak very highly of their teachers and of the extra help they receive. Some students struggle with the mathematical side of physics and lack the self-motivation to persevere when they meet difficulties. Teachers' encouraging and supportive attitudes boost students' confidence and build on students' previous knowledge so that they are able to make satisfactory progress. In a Year 13 revision lesson on standing waves and mechanical resonance the teacher used a series of small demonstrations and video clips to remind students of the physical concepts involved. Throughout the lesson the teacher skilfully questioned students to probe their understanding. Students responded by asking many questions of their own, allowing the teacher to help them to clarify their thinking and deepen their understanding.
186. There is a wide span of prior attainment in Year 12 and teachers do not always provide a variety of activities to meet individual learning needs. This results in the higher-attaining students making insufficient progress in some lessons. There are not enough opportunities for the development of independent learning skills and some students are too reliant on their teachers. The use of ICT to enhance learning is underdeveloped.
187. The head of department analyses student performance carefully and makes good use of assessment data. Best practice is not shared across the department due to insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Stimulating, challenging and knowledgeable teaching ensures that students achieve very well.
- The subject challenges students to think deeply.
- Students are highly skilled in taking charge of their own work.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
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Standards of work seen during the inspection	Well above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Very good	

Commentary

188. At A-level in 2003, results were well above average.

189. Students achieve very well in ICT because of the very good teaching they receive. Teachers have exceptional levels of knowledge, not just the technical skills. They are very well informed about the subject's historical developments as well as current issues. Teachers draw extensively on this knowledge to illustrate points and frequently to provoke discussion of controversial issues. For example, students are required to consider the work of the philosopher Kant when considering implications of copying music from the Internet. This approach leads to students not only developing their computing skills but equally their skills in constructing and presenting arguments or countering the views of others. These critical skills will prove invaluable to students, whether choosing to seek a career in ICT or in other fields. Achievement is better than at the time of the previous inspection.

Example of outstanding practice

Students explored artificial intelligence. They were encouraged to participate through emphasis that this lesson was about expressing opinions: there were no right answers.

Students faced a series of rapid, provocative and challenging questions. Moral issues were raised: 'should a computer be treated in the same way as a pet?' Students paused to reflect on assertions, for example that all human activity was programmed genetically. Throughout, all students challenged not only the teacher's ideas, but also, with manifest respect, the views of others. The Turing Test was quickly introduced. The class considered whether a chess programme represented thinking. Next, students were captivated by the bizarre, posing questions to a website simulating psychoanalysis. The teacher controlled this section of the lesson with extreme care so that students were never at any risk. Students then became engrossed in exploring a series of web bots. Finally, the teacher recommended several books, read a poem about intelligence and a very short story about a man being tricked by a computer-dating agency into dating a computer. Students left the lesson being asked whether computers might become self-reproducing. Was this ICT? Was this philosophy? Did this matter? – It was learning at the most challenging level.

190. Teachers have very detailed knowledge of each student, knowing different ways in which they prefer to learn and presenting material in ways best suited to each learner. The capabilities of each student are assessed in detail so that all know exactly what they should achieve. These targets are highly demanding but very good relationships ensure that students relish the challenge, trusting in their teachers, rather than becoming outfaced. It is noteworthy that a number of students entering the sixth form from other schools with ICT results from Year 11 below those required to start A-level in many other institutions, achieve significantly more than might be expected. High-attaining students in Years 10 and 11, and therefore not yet in the sixth form, also follow the course and achieve as well as others. This laudable provision ensures that they are presented with an appropriate challenge. This provision is in place for the first time in the current year. Although candidates will not take the final examination for a further year, the school recognises that it needs to ensure that a further course of study is provided so that interest and development is sustained after A-level.

191. All students are very well supported by their teachers. This support comes partly through very detailed, ongoing information about achievement but also through the ready availability of

teachers to give assistance and advice with project work. Students value this support greatly and are fulsome in their praise of their teachers. Project work shows a very good understanding of the requirements of the user and is comprehensively documented. Another key factor in teaching is the way in which emphasis is placed on the fact that there is often no single correct answer to a problem. This encourages students to explore possible solutions and greatly increases their facility to learn without dependency upon their teachers. Standards are relatively higher in Year 12 than in Year 13 because the former group of students started the course with more advanced standards than the latter. The school has worked hard to encourage female students to take ICT so that a much higher proportion of females takes the course than is usually case. Their achievement is equal to that of their male counterparts.

192. There is a consistent team approach in teaching so that teachers discuss and share good practice. Under-performance is not tolerated.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

193. Students have levels of skills that are very well matched to the demands of their work. Students use ICT extensively for research and to produce assignments and essays in most subjects. However, greater use of computers in lessons would enhance students' learning further in physics, mathematics, psychology, art and design and health and social care.

HUMANITIES

In this cluster of subjects the school provides courses in geography, history, government and politics, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Psychology was inspected as a focus subject and lessons were sampled in the other subjects. In **geography** A-level results in 2003 were below average. One Year 13 lesson was seen. Good teaching enabled students to demonstrate higher than average standards in discussing the implications of the enlargement of the European Union. In **history**, students reached above average standards learning about the impact of the British Empire on foreign policy. Teaching and learning were very good and students achieved well. In 2003, the results at A-level were well above average. In **government and politics** the results were well below average, but all seven candidates passed. Current standards were above average in the lesson observed in which very good teaching honed the essay skills of students. They were challenged to critically appraise an essay whilst at the same time consolidating their understanding of the differences between the political systems of the USA and the UK. One lesson was seen in **sociology** in Year 12. Students undertaking course-work showed good awareness of social issues but weak investigative skills. Teaching was satisfactory and standards were average. A-level results in 2003 were below average. In the lesson seen in **philosophy**, teaching and learning were satisfactory as students were introduced to conflicting views of religion. Last year there were two candidates; one gained a grade E and the other was ungraded. Currently, a single student studying philosophy at A2 level is receiving very good support from the school on a one-to-one basis and is enjoying the course. In recent years, several students have gone on to read philosophy at universities.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good teaching by specialist teachers who make lessons interesting.
- Good schemes of work aid effective progression.
- Students are interested in psychology and are active in research work.
- Written work across a wide range of tasks is accurate and well organised.

- There is a good collection of assessed work to clarify standards for both the teacher and the students.
- Access to ICT is limited in the classroom.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Average	Average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Good	Good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Very good	
Management of the department		

Commentary

194. A-level examination results have been below average. Female students attain better results than male students. In 2003 results gained are similar to those in past years. Standards of work currently show an improvement in 2004. Predicted grades are higher than those gained in 2003. This is the result of teachers mentoring and supporting students through the course, maintaining a good check on whether they are achieving up to expectation.
195. Students take psychology with differing levels of GCSE performance. On balance standards on entry to the sixth form of those taking psychology are average. Standards of work currently are average. Female students, who are in the majority, achieve better than male students. All enter the sixth form with no previous experience of psychology. However, as a result of good teaching and students' enthusiasm and commitment, students' achievement is good.
196. Psychology is becoming more firmly established in the sixth form. Students are quickly starting to think like scientists and are aware of the technical and medical vocabulary they are required to use in their writing. As they become more successful in this endeavour they become more confident and increase their competence as learners. Students' written work varies greatly in quality. Spelling, grammar and the use of English demonstrate some weaknesses in learning skills. The higher attaining students write appropriately. Folders show they work hard. These students have consistently good attitudes in lessons and invariably gain in knowledge and understanding.
197. In the very good lessons, teachers show knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. As a result, students are well motivated. Teachers' understanding of the required areas of psychology is good. The teachers present complex medical research into human behaviour with clarity. Methods of teaching are imaginative and varied encouraging concentration and the confidence of students. The weakness is independence. Students, in the main, are content to be the recipients of well-prepared handouts and notes. Teacher-produced resources are very effective. However, computers are not used as much as they might, and independently, by some students to reveal more of an insight into psychological practices. Teachers do far more than is necessary to inform students. The teachers' assessment of achievement is thorough and accurate. Students, therefore, know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve further still.
198. High expectations are placed on students but they are not always fulfilled. This can be accounted for by the weak learning skills and in some case a lack of attendance at lessons. Students' performance in psychology is monitored carefully. Students are challenged to adapt quickly to the study pattern required for success at A-level. Work is marked regularly to examination criteria and the interpretation of mark schemes is shared with students. High standards are the goal of the teachers.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology was sampled in the sixth form. Standards were well above average. Two lessons were seen. Both were very good. In the very good lesson in Year 12 at A/S level students were focusing on Retro interiors. Very good presentations were made about the influences of design movements and designers on society. In Year 13 at A2 level students were working to a very high level in the production of individual course-work. In both lessons achievement and learning were very good. The very high level of teacher expertise and their very effective planning and sharing of work has had a direct effect on the standards being attained. At A-level both candidates gained B grades last year.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design, media studies and theatre studies were the focus subjects and music was sampled. In **music** both students gained C grades last year. Two lessons of music in the sixth form were sampled. Standards are above average and achievement is good as a result of good and very good teaching and learning. Several students in Year 12 are using an enrichment session to pursue an AS level course in music over two years. As a new regime settles as part of a performing arts college, more students are expected to choose music at AS and A2 levels.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very strong teaching that incorporates a high level of challenge leads to good A-level results.
- Leadership provides a very good role model and this is driving up standards.
- Students' learning is progressive enabling them to achieve very well.
- The use of ICT as a learning aid is underdeveloped.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Good	
Management of the department		

Commentary

199. A-level results in 2003 were above average. The higher grades A or B were achieved by 40 per cent of students. Achievement for these students was good because they maintained the high standards they had achieved in GCSE and AS level examinations. At AS level in 2003 results were well above the national average. Three-quarters of the students achieved the higher grades A or B.

200. During the course, some students have improved significantly whilst others have maintained high standards over time. Standards are raised when students refer to their own strong experiences. For example, one student had photographed many natural forms on a recent visit to Keswick. Developments from these photographs led to a large painting in which broad, gestural brushstrokes contributed to the high standard of the final outcome.
201. Teachers show extensive knowledge of artists and their work. Students are taught how to use artists' work and generate ideas. From these ideas they use their skills with the formal elements of art to produce work that satisfies examination assessment objectives very well. One student, who had studied Picasso's 'Guernica' was challenged to make an individually creative response. The final outcome was an open frame sculpture containing another form suspended by barbed wire. This student had learned to reject the initial formative ideas and develop ones that more fully reflected her own spiritual feelings about war, pain and suffering. Teachers enjoy working with well-motivated students. One student had produced a wealth of preparation and was finding it difficult to decide which ideas to use. Through a tutorial style interview, in which there was a sophisticated exchange of ideas between the teacher and the student, the student reached an informed decision.
202. The quality of teaching leads to the very good achievement of students for it is always focused on students' learning needs. Assessment is very good. Evaluation sheets are used to record targets that are agreed between student and teacher. The sheets are subsequently used to check progress and set fresh targets. The use of ICT as a learning aid is, at present, underdeveloped. This situation is set to improve because the department has five new computers. Professional development on the application of software is intended to maximise the benefits of this improved provision. Students' attitudes are very positive at all times. They approach independent learning with enthusiasm. Students use the art and design facilities well beyond the end of the normal school day.
203. Leadership provides a very good role model for high standards in teaching. A particularly strong team spirit exists. Everyone's opinions are sought and valued contributing very effectively to improvement in the department. Students' applications to study of art in higher education are supported very well by leadership. Management of examination entries is handled very efficiently. Very good liaison between teachers, who are timetabled with the same group, enables agreement to be made about how students can make the best progress. The very good analysis of examination results focuses on how to improve results in the future. Recruitment on to courses is good and retention is very good. The strong features itemised in the previous inspection report have been maintained.

Media studies

Provision for media studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the 2003 A-level examination were well above the national average.
- Teaching is consistently good and leads to effective learning and good achievement.
- The written work of higher-attaining students is of a high calibre.
- Boys' written work does not match their practical work.
- Students work very effectively together in class and discussion is purposeful.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Good	Good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Good	Good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Good	Good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Good	

Commentary

204. Media studies is a relatively new subject to the sixth-form curriculum. The subject has quickly found its feet and is popular with students. It is amongst the heaviest subscribed subjects. In its first year in 2002, results in the GCE A-level examination were above average; last year, 2003, results were well above average. In both years all students passed the examination and in 2003, half of the students achieved the higher A or B grades. Female students perform better in the written examination, but in practical work there is little variation in standards by gender, although there is a predominance of female students who complete the A-level course. Teachers know the specifications for the examination very well and as a result students are well prepared during an intensive build-up to examinations.
205. It was not possible to see any practical work in Year 12 where male students are said to respond very well. Students achieve well during the course and many had little experience when they started in Year 12. This level of achievement is the result of energetic, confident and enthusiastic teaching. Teachers are committed to the subject and know it well. Students value the knowledge and enthusiasm of teachers and themselves bring very good attitudes to their learning, which as a result is effective.
206. Students show a good understanding of key concepts such as representation and genre; this was seen in a good lesson about television police series with Year 12. The objectives of the lesson were clear to students and they analysed skilfully the different aspects of representation seen in 'cop' programmes from 'Dixon of Dock Green' to the present-day versions of 'The Bill'. They described accurately how social class, language and the perceived role of the police in the community has changed over five to six decades. They also identified successfully features of developing technology and how editing enhances presentation and recording provides sophisticated opportunities not possible in live transmissions. Similarly in Year 13, students preparing for the imminent A-level examination showed their acquired understanding of the media when comparing the messages possible in a horror film trailer for 'The Gladiator' compared with those of a video sleeve for 'Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein'. They interpreted colour, typography and images in order to realise that the video was a spoof whilst the film was in the genre of fantasy-realism. In doing so, higher-attaining students referred to media theorists to support their views.
207. Written course-work and extended essays show that students gain a good theoretical understanding of the subject. There is one exemplary sample of work for students to strive towards when an ex-female student last year achieved maximum marks in an A-level presentation. Current higher attainers write convincingly about the genre of horror movies when comparing three versions of 'Dracula'. Files are well maintained with annotated research material. An enriching visit to the Bradford National Museum of Photography, Film and Television for a day on the horror genre, an above average standard account of the initial scene of 'Scream accompanied by a well-argued account of Wes Craven's modernisation of this genre and essays on how men and women are represented over the years in the media, all show the richness of the school's media course and the quality that results from it. Middle and

lower attainers' files show a sound grasp of the essentials of the subject. Most male students, however, struggle with writing at this level; it does not reflect their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

208. Students respond well to good teaching; teachers are enthusiastic in their approach. This is in response to the very good leadership of the head of subject, whose enthusiasm and high expectations spread amongst other teachers of media studies. Successful examination results are one result of this, but another is the perceptive and critical eyes and ears students bring to their daily contact with the way the media represents their world.

Theatre Studies

Provision for theatre studies is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching results in very effective learning and achievement.
- Standards are well above average.
- Students are committed to success and set themselves high standards.
- The quality of written work does not match that found in practical work.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Excellent	Excellent
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Very good	

Commentary

209. Theatre studies is a successful subject. The number choosing to take it in the past is disappointing; however, the current Year 12 group has the expected number of students. The demands of the course are appropriate, especially to students who have completed a GCSE course in drama, as most usually have. In 2002 and 2003, results in the GCE A-level examination were above average. In both years, all students passed the examination and in 2003 over a third gained the higher A or B grades; in the previous year, two-thirds achieved these grades. Some students find the written aspects of the examination difficult, but there is little significant difference in the performance of female or male students, although there is a predominance of female students who complete the A-level course.

Example of outstanding practice

In an outstanding lesson with Year 12 preparing a performance for examination and to take out into the community, students worked very well independently.

The students worked on a modern adaptation of 'The Canterbury Tales' as an examination piece to be performed in a local church. Their independent working reflected a clear understanding of theatrical conventions. It was enhanced by sensitive intervention by the teacher in the role of audience, demanding clarity in interpretation and portrayal. Students possessed a range of skills: dance, mime, singing, improvisation and a good sense of the comic. All pieces were either stylised interpretations or inventive use of music-hall tradition. The students' innovative capacity led to impressive, imaginative interpretations and extensions of the text through disciplined, controlled use of dramatic conventions, working together with sensitive performance through voice and movement. They had been quick to develop character and symbolic representations of real or imagined situations, often through skilful use of ritual. The quality of this work reflects the skill of the teacher who has very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, is a practitioner himself and has very high expectations of himself and the students. This was very apparent in the unobtrusive way his intervention nudged the performances of students in this lesson to levels that were well above average.

210. Teaching is very good because it is secure and makes challenging demands of students. The inspection took place close to the examination period, so the results of very effective teaching were clear to see in students' independent work on practical set pieces for examination. The quality of teaching, learning and achievement in Year 12 prepared students well for the more demanding rigours of Year 13. These students were beginning to plan performances of 'The Trial', a theatre adaptation by Steven Berkoff of work by Franz Kafka. In this, students wrestled with theatrical conventions of physical theatre in a type of stage setting new to them, together with a complex set of ideas around the notion of personal guilt and the nature of one person's mastership over others. They explored the idea of narration and chorus following an intense session in response to percussive sound patterns. This well structured lesson led to a quality of performance that had a cohesive whole. Later in the week this had developed into further physical representations of the themes, constantly using the text as a reference point. Students had begun to capture the metaphysical spirit of Kafka and the physicality and staging of Berkoff. An associate teacher led the lessons, well supported by the usual teacher and collaboratively they were successful in giving students a creative focus upon which to build. Students achieved very well in response to this very good teaching. The interaction between teacher and taught continued throughout the lessons, but the resulting work was that of the students' excellent independent efforts. The teachers were in attendance as qualifiers of the students' outcomes in order to lead on to further development.
211. This department is a strength of the school. It is outward-looking in seeking opportunities to enrich students' experience. Performance and new learning go hand-in-hand. Good accommodation and resources are extremely well used. Most of all, teachers work together, share their successes and near misses, plan and work collaboratively and together strive for excellence.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

In this curriculum area, sport studies was the focus subject and **travel and tourism** was sampled. In the very good lesson seen in travel and tourism, students were given a clear framework and a variety of resources to investigate a case study of the advantages of tourist development. Results in 2003 were below average.

Sports studies

Provision in sports studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently very good teaching leads directly to very good learning.
- Students achieve very well in lessons and examinations.
- The department is well led and managed.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Above average	Above average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Good	Good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good Good	
Management of the department		

Commentary

212. In 2003, results at A-level fell below the national average. This does not represent a trend. AS-level results in 2003 were well above the national average. There is good evidence to suggest that results in 2004 will return to the previously higher levels. Almost all students complete the courses they start.
213. Students consistently produce course-work of a good standard. Year 12 shows a very positive approach to learning. Students' note-taking is effective, and builds a good resource for revision. Students continually building their portfolios as a result of the demands for quality insisted on by teachers. Students find A-level work demanding, but interesting and exciting. They are happy with their choice of courses, and gain valuable support from teachers when needed. They have a strong feeling of group identity. Students with differing learning needs respect each other's views, give mutual support and encouragement and make progress at broadly similar rates. They have a very good understanding of the technical vocabulary of the subject.
214. Year 12 students have gained a very firm grasp of the structure and function of the heart, and they can trace the flow of blood from the vena cava, through heart and lungs, and out through the aorta to oxygenate the whole of the body. They are comfortable with the cardiac cycle and know what effects exercise has on this. In Year 13, students interpret factors impinging on the development of physical education in Britain and selected other countries as a result of their understanding of the social, ethical, political background of these countries.
215. Teaching ensures that all students learn very well. The best teaching is characterised by the clarity of its objectives, which consolidate and extend previous work, and by its relentless pace, which forces students to make a full commitment to study. Interesting and dynamic teaching challenges students to take responsibility for their own learning, often by the use of open-ended questions. Teachers know the subject very well, witnessed in their questioning and exposition. They have high expectations of their students in terms of work rate and performance, both physical and intellectual. Students respond well to the challenges set by their teachers and as a result their overall achievement is very good in both practical and theoretical work. Regular assessments give students a clear picture of their achievement.
216. The staff's strengths are well deployed to meet the demands of the sixth-form syllabus. The teaching team is energetic and committed and has strong determination to raise standards even higher. New initiatives being introduced will increase the involvement of students with the community and strengthen learning opportunities. Students' performance data are not used to ascertain what is working best for each student. Good accommodation and good resources for learning support the effectiveness of well-planned and organised lessons.

BUSINESS

In this area the school runs courses in business studies, business VCE and economics. None were inspected in depth, but two lessons were sampled. In a good **business studies** lesson students enjoyed discussing a well-chosen selection of ethical questions relating to the work place. In exchanging views with each other and with the teacher, they came to appreciate some of the difficulties faced by management when deciding whether to discipline staff. The results in 2003 were well below average, having been well above average in 2002. In a very good lesson in **economics**, students learnt very well through the tutorial style adopted by the teacher. They used their essays to an examination question on economic advantage to explore how their work could be further improved. This led into students learning very well about exchange rates through discussion. Standards in this lesson were well above average. There were no candidates last year.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' high expectations of all students promote a high level of achievement.
- Assessment is directly related to examination standards.
- Students' very positive attitudes contribute to the quality of their learning.
- Teaching has a very good focus on the development of key skills.
- Computers are not used enough in lessons to support and enrich learning.

Key inspection judgements

Judgement	Year 12	Year 13
Standards of work seen during the inspection	Average	Average
Achievement: whether the standards students reach are as high as they should be	Very good	Very good
Attitudes of students to their work	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good
Effectiveness of assessment	Very good	Very good
Quality of learning	Very good	Very good
Quality of curriculum leadership	Very good	
Management of the department	Very good	

Commentary

217. Given that most students who begin the course have very modest GCSE results these standards represent very good achievement. Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and syllabus enables them to explain units very clearly to develop students' understanding of the work. Students gain experience of practical learning on very effective and successful work placements. They use these well to gather data using a variety of research methods effectively. Students reach average standards when they observe and record human behaviour accurately and relate it to psychological theory on, for example, obsessive-compulsive disorder. They have yet to reach the highest grades by thoroughly evaluating their findings and being critical of their conclusions to enable them to suggest improvements to care policies. However, students know exactly what to do to improve their work because teachers check their achievement regularly and use feedback sheets as a basis for individual tutorials.

218. Numbers taking the course have gradually increased and the majority moves into related employment or training, with significant numbers joining the nursing profession. Students take

either the single or double award. Results improved in 2003 and were slightly below average. They were lower in the single award because two out of four candidates did not complete the course.

Example of outstanding practice

In an outstanding lesson introducing education for health and well-being, the learning objectives were made crystal clear from the outset.

Further use of probing questions enabled them to identify and place their answers into physical, emotional, social or intellectual categories. Students' oral responses improved rapidly as they learned from each other and gained confidence in speaking. Their knowledge of the topic was increased through group work and discussion as they identified factors affecting health and stuck them on to a 'wall of good health'. This method was appropriately challenging. It totally engaged students and the teacher moved effectively round the groups, ensuring an excellent pace of learning and enabling all students to succeed. By reorganising their 'bricks' they quickly built on their understanding of the responsibilities and structure of health care in this country. The plenary enabled students to recognise how and where to focus their research in preparation for the next stage of their learning, producing leaflets and planning campaigns to promote good health.

219. Students' personal development is secured through the very effective promotion of independent learning. Very good planning, together with guidance on how to use resources outside the classroom, created rapid learning on factors affecting child development. Students presented and shared their work with the rest of the class and the teacher made timely interventions to reinforce good points and suggest how other work should be extended. There are no computers readily available to support and enrich learning in lessons and this restricts opportunities throughout the course. Teaching is less effective when students spend too much time focused on one activity and the pace of learning slows. It is least effective, though still satisfactory, when students are not sufficiently challenged, for example, being told how to present data rather than invited to present it in different ways.
220. There is a very clear vision and determination to raise standards and results even further through continuing to improve the effectiveness of teamwork. At every department meeting teachers analyse the very best teaching and how students learn best. Lessons are observed and there is a further check on the quality of teaching through moderation of students' portfolios.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	3
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	2
Overall standards achieved		3
Students' achievement	3	3
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well students learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	2
The effectiveness of management	3	4

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