

INSPECTION REPORT

SOUTH BROMSGROVE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 116929

Headteacher: Mr P. McTague

Lead inspector: Mr D. Driscoll

Dates of inspection: 9th – 12th February 2004

Inspection number: 259263

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

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Terms used in this report

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

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	13 – 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1265
School address:	South Bromsgrove Community High School Charford Road Bromsgrove Worcestershire
Postcode:	B60 3NL
Telephone number:	01527 831783
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C. Hill
Date of previous inspection:	22 nd September 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

South Bromsgrove is a larger than average high school, with a larger than average sixth form. Numbers in all years have increased significantly since the last inspection as a result of the school's increasing popularity. There are now many more parents wishing to send their children to the school than there are places available. The great majority of students are white British, with very few from any other ethnic group. The proportion of students whose mother tongue is not English is low and all are fluent in English.

Standards of attainment on entry to the school are average, although this varies from subject to subject; standards are below average in physical education for example, but above average in science. Standards on entry to the sixth form are average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average, as is the proportion with a statement; the school has a special unit for students with specific learning difficulties. Most students are on the register because they have specific learning or social, emotional or behavioural difficulties; the school also has a special facility, called Brookside, for vulnerable students who are being reintegrated into mainstream education. There are now many more students with special educational needs at the school than there were at the time of the previous inspection, but a smaller proportion with statements.

Students come mostly from the local area; socio-economic circumstances are above average.

The school is a specialist technology college and received many awards in recent years, including awards for the quality of work in sports, the arts, basic skills, the curriculum, careers and overall

achievement. The school has been awarded a Charter Mark and Investor in People status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
11933	D. Driscoll	Lead inspector	
9086	R. Watkins	Lay inspector	
33139	M. Wilson	Team inspector	Mathematics.
19596	B. Treacy	Team inspector	English.
4145	C. Harrison	Team inspector	Science. Chemistry.
10297	D. Cox	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT).
17868	E. Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art and design.
15208	A. Briggs	Team inspector	Music.
15832	J. Vanstone	Team inspector	History. Business studies in the sixth form.
15462	C. Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography.
3793	J. Peach	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages.
30973	G. Hancock	Team inspector	Design and technology.
12985	S. Jeffray	Team inspector	Physical education.
30427	F. Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	Religious education.
2597	C. Jackson	Team inspector	Business studies. Health and social care in the sixth form.
11720	P. Winch	Team inspector	Special educational needs.
22590	R. Castle	Team inspector	Citizenship.

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an excellent school that provides an **outstanding** quality of education and excellent value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average, reflecting students' excellent achievement as a result of outstanding teaching.
- There is an exceptional level of consistency and innovation in all the school does as a result of its outstanding leadership.
- There is an ethos in the school that promotes hard work, very good attitudes and equality for all.
- The use of ICT in teaching and in managing information is quite remarkable.
- The excellent use of data ensures that all students are challenged to do better in all aspects of their education.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding.

Progress since the last inspection has been **excellent**. Standards are higher and achievement is better as a result of significantly improved teaching. All of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been addressed successfully and many are now strengths of the school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement for all groups of students is **excellent**. Standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11. In all years, students perform much better than expected given their levels of prior attainment. Achievement in the sixth form is very good; standards are well above average.

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides an **excellent** quality of education. Teaching is **excellent**. Teaching is very good in all years, including the sixth form; this consistency of very good teaching leads to an excellent provision overall and to excellent learning. Teaching is at least good in all subjects and in several it is very good. Teachers have innovative approaches to planning lessons and make far more use of ICT than is usually seen. The pace of lessons is outstanding and leads to students working exceptionally hard on their studies.

The curriculum is excellent; it is good in Year 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. There is an excellent range of extra clubs and activities. Provision for special educational needs and for vulnerable pupils is excellent. The quality of guidance and support for students is outstanding and the school has a very good partnership with parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the school by the headteacher and other senior staff is **excellent**, as is the school's management. Governance is very good. This is a school that is highly innovative and extremely consistent in all that it does. The headteacher and all those in positions of responsibility provide outstanding role models for students and other staff.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Comments are based on those students and parents who responded to the questionnaires or attended the parents' meeting. Parents are happy with the education their children receive; students are very happy.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

This is a school with no major weaknesses of any kind and little of its work falls below an above average standard. Only one issue requires consideration by the school's senior managers:

- Ensure that the school's marking policy encourages teachers to have a greater impact on spelling, punctuation and grammar.

And to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form provides a **very good** education and its cost-effectiveness is **very good**. There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Excellent leadership and management are ensuring rapid improvement and a high degree of consistency in all aspects of its work.

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 . Teaching and learning are good so students achieve well. Provision in French is good . Students are achieving well because they are given demanding tasks and regularly work with authentic materials.
Mathematics	Good . The very good level of teachers' knowledge leads to clear explanations of concepts.
Science	Provision in chemistry is good . Teachers are very knowledgeable and plan lessons carefully to include a good variety of interesting and challenging activities.
Information and communication technology	Very good . Excellent leadership has resulted in a unique system whereby all students have fantastic opportunities to make use of ICT.
Humanities	Provision in religious education is good . Teachers use simple explanations to support the understanding of difficult concepts.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology is good . Teaching is good; lessons are well structured and teachers possess a good knowledge of the subject.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in music is very good . Students learn very well because of the very good teaching.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is very good . The outstanding extra-curricular provision boosts achievement considerably.
Business	Provision in business studies is very good . Very good teaching produces challenging lessons that move at pace and lead to very good achievement.
Health and social care	Provision in health and social care is good . Teachers are sensitive to students' individual needs and match activities appropriately.

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

Excellent attention is given to students' welfare and guidance. The school extends admirable support to students through excellent monitoring systems and readily available well-targeted help and advice from teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are **excellent**. The sixth form has made excellent progress in recent years and benefits from the same high degree of consistency and innovation in its work as takes place in the main school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

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

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11. Students do much better than expected in all years, so, when this level of achievement is combined, their overall achievement during their time at school is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are doing much better than expected in several subjects, and better than expected in all others.
- Students achieved very well in their GCSE examinations in 2003 given their results when they were in Year 9.
- The school ensures that all groups of students can achieve equally.
- Standards, and results, are rising quickly and consistently.

Commentary

1. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average and students have achieved very well in their first year at the school. Results from the national tests in 2003 were well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. The results in English were a slight dip, as the average for the last three years show results to be well above average for all three subjects. Students did much better than would usually be expected in mathematics and science, given their results in Year 6, and better in English, although some of this progress has taken place at the middle schools. Results have been rising at a faster rate than the national average.
2. Students achieve well in almost all their subjects, and very well in art and design, ICT, mathematics, music and religious education. Achievement is satisfactory in German, which is a second language in Year 9, as students have not previously studied the subject.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.4 (34.7)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	37.7 (37.8)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.9 (35.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 327 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Students continue to do much better than expected in Years 10 and 11. Results in the GCSE examinations were well above average overall, even before the re-mark of the art and ICT examination papers; the school is still awaiting the new results for ICT. These results were much better than would usually be expected from the students' results in the national tests at the end of Year 9. However, students are also successful at other examinations, such as AS-level accounting, which are not included in the GCSE results, so results are even better than they appear on the surface. Results have been improving at a faster rate than that seen nationally.

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	62* (43)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95* (86)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99* (95)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	39.2* (34.7)	38.2 (34.7)

There were 303 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 figures marked * have not yet been finalised as the school is awaiting the outcome of a re-marking of the ICT examination. These results cannot be lowered, but may well be considerably improved by the re-mark.*

4. Students achieve at least well in all their subjects, and very well in art and design, citizenship, history, music and science. In all years, the level of achievement can be attributed to the quality of teaching that the students receive. However, in religious education, the achievement is not quite as good as the teaching would usually merit, as the amount of time spent on the subject is below that usually seen.
5. In all years, there are few differences between the achievements of different groups of pupils. Girls gained better results than boys in their GCSE examinations in 2003, but they were further ahead when they were in Year 9, so the difference is not down to girls making progress more quickly than boys. There is, however, one area where girls do outperform boys: design and technology. Here, girls are much more likely to choose food or textiles where the teaching is very good, whereas the boys are more likely to choose resistant materials or systems and control, where the teaching is satisfactory. Overall, it appears that girls do better than boys in design and technology, but those boys who choose food or textiles do equally as well as the girls. Similarly, boys do not appear to do as well as girls in French and German, but this is because there are more boys in the lower attaining groups, which get less time than the other classes.
6. Overall, the achievement of students with special educational needs is excellent. In the specialist areas, students respond very well to the one-to-one support with spelling, reading and number work, and from the impressive variety of activities both in and out of school. Because of the excellent management of this provision, students improve not only in their subject work but also in their social skills. At the end of Year 11, they do very well in the GCSE examinations and many go on to the school post-16 or college courses. Gifted and talented students are given many opportunities to study extra subjects at a range of levels, including advanced level; their achievement, like all others, is excellent.
7. Standards in the basic skills of mathematics and ICT are well above average. Standards of language and literacy are not as good and are above average, mainly as a result of a quirk in the assessment policy, which does not encourage teachers to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar on a sufficiently frequent basis.
8. Standards and achievement have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Sixth form

Standards are well above average and students are achieving very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well on many courses and very well on some.
- Results are well above average and improving.

Commentary

9. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were well above average, as they have been for the past three years. Results for males and females were similar. Each year's results show that students do very well in the sixth form and achieve much better standards than would be expected given their GCSE results. Standards are now much higher than they were at the time of the previous inspection.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.0 (93.9)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	34.0 (29.3)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	294.8 (286.9)	253.1 (254.5)

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

10. Standards are above average in most subjects, so when all these above average standards are added together, students leave with a total A-level score that is well above average. In almost all the subjects inspected, students are achieving well. However, in business studies, design and technology and ICT, achievement is very good. The consistency of at least good achievement in subjects leads to very good achievement overall. Students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, are helped to do very well by the care that is taken in placing them on appropriate courses; a very wide range of which is available. The most important factor in this level of achievement, however, is the very good quality of teaching that students receive. There are, however, other aspects of the school's education that promote such good achievement. For example, the way that ICT is used and the students' attitudes to their work are significant contributory factors.

Example of outstanding practice

The use of ICT to promote achievement.

All students in the sixth form are provided with a laptop computer that is connected to a wireless network. Through this medium, students have access to vast range of teaching notes and lesson plans that teachers have prepared for them. There are many advantages to this system. Students do not waste time in copying down notes; instead they can simply annotate electronically the teacher's notes or customise them for their own use. The notes come ready organised for the students, so problems of keeping work in a form that can be accessed easily for revision, often a problem for male students, is no longer an issue. Students who are absent can easily make up the work they have missed in their own time. Teachers are instantly available for support via email. Most of all, it allows students to work where and when they want to; throughout the inspection many were observed sitting outside, working away on their laptops, totally engrossed in their work.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good, because of the very good promotion of their social development and excellent support for their moral development. Spiritual and cultural development are good. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students take pride in their school and live up to their teachers' expectations by working with much enthusiasm and concentration.
- A sense of personal responsibility is promoted to great effect, so students have a strong sense of right and wrong and become very mature in their attitudes.
- Students relate very well to each other and to teachers, and this contributes to the impressive atmosphere for learning.
- Attendance is promoted energetically, with much success in supporting any students who are in danger of losing out through absence.

Commentary

11. Very good attitudes and behaviour are the norm across the whole spread of school activities. Students want to do well in lessons. They are usually so interested by the pace and challenge of the activities that there is little room for any distracting behaviour to develop. Teachers very actively promote interest levels, as in geography for instance, when boys' attitudes were found to show room for improvement and successful strategies were used to bring this about. The positive atmosphere created through teachers' use of praise and awards is another factor that helps make students eager to succeed. In occasional lessons where there are pauses between activities they may lapse briefly into chatter but they soon focus willingly again when presented with the next task. Students with special educational needs and those who are in danger of losing out through any disadvantageous personal circumstances are as fully involved as others. They work with high interest and concentration because of the high quality planning that matches support to their individual needs.
12. Students gain a pronounced sense of responsibility for their own actions, because staff treat them as responsible individuals and encourage them to make right choices. They have a strong respect for others and behave because they know what is right, rather than just because they are told what to do. The quality of relationships means that few concerns arise about bullying. Students are confident that staff will help if such problems ever arise. Incidents of poor behaviour occur at times, but are well managed so detract little from the quality of the school community. The number of fixed term exclusions is relatively low and permanent exclusions are average.
13. Students have very good opportunities for personal development through involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities throughout the year, and join in them enthusiastically. They respond well to the opportunities to interact with students from other years through the house competitions, becoming confident and mutually supportive. Many students undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and through it become responsible for their own achievements in the arts, sport and service to the community. They show themselves to be confident and reliable in the planning and execution of their expeditions and in their support for each other. They value the school's Eisteddfod as a high point of the year and the final evening provides not only a fine cultural experience, but also a spiritually uplifting one. Students demonstrate good awareness of spiritual questions through their work in religious education, as when with candles, music and poetry they convey the events of the Holocaust and reflect on the questions that arise from it. Those who visit the battlefields in Europe have very good opportunities to reflect on sacrifice and the futility of war and their response is thoughtful. Assemblies give good moral awareness; however, they are not generally used to promote spiritual reflection to the same extent and opportunities for prayer are not offered. The school enables students to gain a good awareness of the arts and cultures of other nations through subjects such as music, art, and religious education. Links, for instance with an education centre in Tanzania, also contribute. However, first hand appreciation of the diverse cultures found in England is limited.

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	1242	43	3
White – Irish	3		
White – any other White background	7		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1		
Mixed – White and Black African	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	5		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	0		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Chinese	3		

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

14. Attendance remains similar to that seen at the previous inspection and is in line with the average in secondary schools across the country. This is despite it not having Years 7 and 8 students who boost attendance in a typical secondary school. Most students come to school regularly and do not stay away without good reason. This is helped by the way staff carefully monitor attendance through a computerised system, and promptly follow up any unexplained absence. A significant minority of students, approaching one in 10 in older groups, cause concern at times by poor attendance but the school works effectively to counteract any problems. Staff place a very strong emphasis on positive steps to resolve the problems underlying absenteeism. Support packages are very carefully constructed to meet individual needs. The learning support centre makes a big contribution to improving individual attendance.
15. Brookside plays a very special part in changing the attitudes to education of those students who are school phobic. The siting of the building, next to the school gate, means students do not have to go through the main school, which helps to develop their confidence. Slowly but surely they are reintegrated into mainstream education at a pace that is appropriate to them, confident that there is always support available should they start to slip back.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.1	School data	0.5
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

complete reporting year.

Sixth form

Students' attitudes are very good and their behaviour is excellent. Their personal development is very good. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students show an impressive sense of responsibility for their work.
- Students respond with great enthusiasm and maturity to the opportunities offered, for them to contribute to the life of the school and of the wider community.

Commentary

16. Students are very happy with the provision made for them in the sixth form. An atmosphere of friendliness and respect is apparent between students and teachers, with a very strong, shared focus on learning. Students want to succeed. They appreciate the way teachers plan lessons to meet their needs and they nearly always respond very enthusiastically, tackling challenging tasks willingly and concentrating hard to complete them. They are happy to contribute ideas in discussion and to work collaboratively when this is asked. They understand that they must organise themselves to work and show considerable responsibility in the way they cope with independent tasks, making good use of private study time. Students' mature attitudes and high motivation mean that problems with behaviour or even lack of interest in work are rare. They mostly observe the expectations of their regular attendance and arrive in good time for lessons. The school's expectation that students will dress in a manner appropriate to a business environment is fully respected by the students, leading to exceptionally smart dress that is a credit to the students, their parents and the school itself.
17. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is very good. In many curriculum areas students are challenged to consider ethical and moral issues and they respond in a mature and reflective way. They have good opportunities to work with visiting specialists in a series of workshops through general studies, enabling them to gain insight into topics such as human rights and democracy, and the work of the United Nations. They have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, which they are ready to debate. Their enthusiasm and confidence is boosted as they join in the very wide range of additional activities offered. Many make big gains in self-reliance through their participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, for instance as they serve the community, working with the elderly, the physically and mentally impaired and the very young. Through their roles as organisers and managers of school events such as the Eisteddfod and sports day, they develop their leadership skills and provide positive role models for younger students. As a result of the range of very good opportunities, they become confident adults with a good understanding of their responsibility for others. The sixth form has a clear sense of its own identity that is enhanced by activities such as the video year-book and the Christmas entertainment performed for teachers and Year 11.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good in Years 9, 10 and 11; the consistency of this very good teaching leads to an excellent teaching provision. The quality of assessment of students' work is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is at least good in all subjects; in several it is very good.
- The pace and challenge in lessons lead to excellent learning for all.
- The use of ICT by teachers is outstanding.
- A very high proportion of lessons is very good or excellent.
- There is a very high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school, because of the very good systems for assessing students.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 235 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
19 (8%)	74 (31%)	102 (43%)	38 (16%)	2 (1%)	0	0

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

Commentary

18. In Year 9, teaching is at least good in all subjects and is very good in art and design, ICT, mathematics, music and religious education. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is at least good in all subjects and is very good in art and design, citizenship, history, music, religious education and science. It is this consistency that is at the heart of the school's excellent teaching provision; in around two lessons in every five a student can expect to receive teaching that is very good or outstanding and it is relatively rare for them to come across a merely satisfactory lesson.
19. There are many very good features of the teaching, but some are outstanding and these stem from teachers' excellent planning. Teachers do not simply plan lessons to get the content across to students, they plan them to ensure that individuals within the lesson will all learn at a cracking pace. They start by considering the needs of students as individuals; individual education plans are analysed in detail and strategies to meet the needs of students with special educational needs are built into the lesson. Teachers then consider the different ways that students learn and build into the lesson a range of activities that will appeal to different students. The activities themselves are then carefully timed to really push the students through the work.
20. The element of timing is crucial in promoting the excellent pace of learning in lessons. Students will be given seconds, literally, to work something out or to discuss it with a partner. Students are often paired with a member of the opposite sex in order to make the most of their differing approaches to solving problems. The higher the attainment of the class, the faster the pace of the lesson will be.
21. The planning also takes very careful account of the targets for which students are aiming. These targets are very demanding, as a result of the school's drive to add as much value as possible. These demanding targets in turn make for very demanding lessons. However, teachers also have cunning ways of maintaining this pace; they use ICT to excellent effect. All of the lesson objectives are on presentation software, as are the tasks and notes. This means that teachers do not have to keep writing on the board, and students do not have to wait for the teacher while they are writing. Students never need get behind with their work, as all notes are available on the network. Students never have problems reading a teacher's handwriting, or getting the work down before the teacher needs to clean the board. The ICT is also used to give students experiences that would otherwise be impossible; using virtual babies and stick-

on virtual nipples in child development for example, to show what it is really like caring for a baby over an extended period.

22. Teaching and learning of students with special educational needs are very good in the two units. Teachers and teaching assistants know students very well and set work that closely meets students' varying needs. They have high expectations of how students should behave and how much they can reasonably achieve, so students learn very quickly. Relationships are very good, which leads to students having very good attitudes to their work. An outstanding feature of lessons is the exceptional teamwork between staff.
23. The key to the school's success, however, is that the features described above are the rule, not the exception. Students at South Bromsgrove are now so used to the demanding pace, exceptional challenge and use of ICT that they just accept it as the norm. In response to this provision, students work exceptionally hard, never misbehaving because they simply do not have time to do so, or the inclination. They are enjoying their lessons because they promote a healthy competition within the individual student. As one group of students said, "They get the comments spot on. There is always praise for what you have done, but then they always tell you what you could do even better."

Example of outstanding practice

The use of exciting activities in science.

The science department uses a particularly wide range of interesting and exciting activities for students. Teachers ensure that students are constantly using all their senses, and learning in different ways. The result is that students' imagination and creativity are stimulated and students realise that these aspects of their talents can be harnessed to help them understand and remember scientific ideas. An outstanding example is to be found in chemistry where students have produced a range of board games designed to teach other students the details of the Haber process for the manufacture of ammonia. The games are beautifully produced and accurate in all aspects of the process. Some have incredible attention to detail, with the students' own portraits adorning the 'Monopoly'-type money and a lifelike model of their teacher as a 'counter'. In producing these games, students not only enjoyed themselves, and gained a great deal of satisfaction, they also had to use and understand the process and the economic factors associated with it. For other students, fortunate enough to use these games, the Haber process has surely never before been so memorable or so much fun.

Assessment

24. Assessment of students' achievement is central to how the school measures and improves the quality of what it does; it is at the heart of much of the decision-making process. The wide range of information that the school holds about students' achievements and progress is used to ensure that standards continue to rise and that students achieve their potential. It is used to inform discussions at all levels about the trends and future targets for the school, about the quality of the performance of teachers and of different groups of students.
25. ICT is extremely well used to ensure that teachers have easy access to accurate and relevant information about the students that they teach so that they can plan their lessons appropriately. For example, the teachers of students in Year 11 know which students are not far from the next grade up and they then try to ensure that these students get advice on how to improve. Teachers also record progress systematically so that they can tell if a student is falling behind, and plan to intervene.
26. Both the heads of department and academic development co-ordinators also carefully track individual students' progress across a range of subjects. These two people play a key role in helping students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and it is seen as the joint responsibility of the teacher and the student to ensure that any problems are addressed. Students are given good information on a twice-termly basis about their performance and are

offered regular review sessions with teachers and their parents to discuss the information. Students are very aware of what they need to do to improve and what their targets are. In science, teachers use some sophisticated techniques for checking what students already know and use this information well when planning lessons so that students do not repeat work unnecessarily.

27. The assessment of students with special educational needs is excellent. Students' response to the many aspects of the provision is very carefully monitored and recorded. Students and parents are involved in assessments and the data obtained is very well used when reviewing the targets of the individual education plans. Thorough analysis of GCSE results enables teachers to evaluate the success of the study skills classes.
28. The area of assessment that is slightly less strong is the marking of students' work. Teachers adhere to the policy of marking one piece of work in detail per half term as a minimum, but this fails to pick up everyday errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. The result is that standards in English are not quite as good as those in mathematics and science.

Sixth form

Teaching in the sixth form is very good and brings about very good learning. Procedures for, and use of, assessment are excellent. Teaching is at least good in all the subjects inspected and is very good in business studies, ICT and music.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is at least good in all the subjects inspected and is very good in some.
- The consistency of very good teaching in the main school carries on in the sixth form.

Commentary

29. The same strengths in the teaching found in the main school are also apparent in the sixth form. Teachers possess the depth of subject knowledge that is required to meet the needs of all the students in the sixth form, some of whom are very able indeed and very thirsty for knowledge. The same rapid pace exists in the sixth form and sometimes this is quite breathtaking. In one accountancy lesson, for example, for very able students who were studying for full A-level in one year, the teacher rapidly moved through the five stages of finding a particular outcome. This process took less than 30 seconds, but all the students grasped it immediately and went on to apply the rule to new situations. The inspector had been left behind at the first stage, but as the teacher pointed out, "If you don't go at this pace, they get bored because it would be too easy for them."
30. In the sixth form, students' progress is tracked outstandingly well, using sophisticated ICT systems to ensure all teachers and students have access to all of the information all of the time. There is a well-established system for reviewing students' performance, and then comparing this with predictions for future attainment, and this allows teachers to intervene promptly if action is needed.
31. Examination results are extremely well analysed so that any trends or unusual occurrences can be remedied. For example, in French, students did badly in the speaking element of the examination in one year. This was immediately identified and several strategies were put into place to ensure that this was not a weakness in subsequent years.
32. Marking of students' work is thorough and outlines clearly what students need to do to improve. The teachers make the criteria for evaluating work accessible to all the students, so many are able to assess their own work effectively and know exactly what they have to do to improve.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good in Year 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. There is an excellent range of extra clubs and activities. The school has a very good match of teachers and resources to its needs; accommodation is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has a very strong commitment to students being treated equally.
- There are many opportunities for students, in all years, to attend extra clubs and activities.
- ICT is a strength of the curriculum; it is used very effectively to improve students' achievement.
- Excellent provision is made for students who are gifted and talented.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

33. The school is intent on providing a broad curriculum in which all students receive their statutory entitlement and is entirely successful in its efforts. The length of the school week is considerably longer than the national average, which allows students to study more subjects and ensure that they are taught personal and social education every day, which has a considerable impact on their personal development as well as providing part of a very good programme of careers education. A strength of the school is the excellent liaison it has with local middle schools; this enables a seamless progression for students from Year 8 into Year 9. Students are taught a range of subjects, such as a second foreign language, over and above the National Curriculum in Year 9. Students then choose from an excellent range of subjects in Years 10 and 11, including vocational courses, that are very well suited to their needs. Many students also take advantage of the opportunities for out of hours learning courses. At present these include courses such as accountancy, Latin, Russian and Spanish.
34. A rich and varied experience is provided for all students. The school is very strong in the area of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme; the school is the largest centre in the world. Much of the school's extra-curricular provision programme feeds into the skill and physical achievement sections of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. The annual school play, citizenship productions and Eisteddfod involving middle and special schools and the local community enable students to show off their music, dance, sport and drama talents. The school has achieved a number of national awards such as the Sportsmark and Artsmark gold.

Example of outstanding practice

The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

"I remember thinking, as we completed the last leg of our Gold expedition, what I had achieved through the D of E over the years." These are the memories of a sixth form student, reflecting on his experience of the Duke of Edinburgh Award. This scheme is an integral part of the personal development programme for students at South Bromsgrove. Last year, over 400 boys and girls participated, with a supporting team of more than 50 staff. The school operates a fully inclusive policy, and over 3000 awards have been achieved since 1991, including nearly 500 Gold Awards. The scheme is incredibly popular with students; it is 'cool' to take part. The successful completion rate is over 90 per cent. All participants carry out their expeditions at the school camp during the annual Activities Week. Every member of staff supports the scheme either directly, or through their role as form tutor. As a result, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and the Specialist Schools' Trust have recently cited South Bromsgrove as an outstanding Centre of Excellence. It is no coincidence that the Leading Aspects Award Agency has also presented the school with an award for 'World Class Delivery' of the scheme with particular praise for inspirational leadership.

35. The school has an excellent provision and a wide range of activities for those students who are particularly gifted or talented; for example, in business studies, some high achievers choose to follow GCSE in one year and achieve well, while others may study for AS-levels alongside their

GCSEs in Year 11. Much of the provision is embedded within subjects and because of the inclusive nature of the school, all students benefit from these programmes because of the way that teachers plan so very well for lessons that take account of the individual.

36. One highly effective strategy used by the school is the way that it empowers students to use ICT in their studies. Teachers actively encourage students to use ICT for a very wide range of tasks, and throughout the inspection, numerous examples of how ICT improved achievement were seen. Students are very confident with computers and are very happy to use them for research or to help them with their homework. The school is able to do this because of the innovative way it has provided computers across the school, using a leasing scheme for students. Almost every classroom now has a computer projector and many different forms of ICT are used to motivate students. Teachers are not just highly competent in their subject, but also extremely confident in using computers, helped by an excellent technical staff.
37. Overall, the school makes very good provision for students with special educational needs. Most, but not all, teachers refer to the targets of the education plans when preparing lessons and this helps students learn well as their individual needs are being considered in detail. Teaching assistants give very good support to students in lessons. In the specialist areas, provision is outstanding.

Example of outstanding practice

The excellence of the provision for students with special educational needs in the two special units.

The school provides a remarkable variety of activities to help these students learn better. The sailing programme gives students a chance to show initiative and improve co-ordination. The same can be said of the daily movement sessions. Students spend ten minutes at the start of the day on a series of exercises beginning with jogging on the spot. All teaching assistants support this activity and give individual attention. Achievement is carefully recorded, with students having a say. Parents have been trained to help students consolidate their work. The students say how much the tasks help their concentration and classroom learning. A comparatively recent scheme on handwriting runs for ten days. On day one, students work on various exercises all day, then for 30 minutes on the nine subsequent school days. During this time, they do no other writing – they use laptops. This breaks them of previous writing habits. Evidence shows that remarkable progress is made. Students can see this and their self-esteem is boosted. A programme of classical music helps students to listen more effectively. In the study skills classes, students receive individual attention with their examination work, often through the use of computers. This provision leads to very good achievement in GCSE. The student support unit (Brookside) provides a peaceful, supportive environment for students who are reluctant to attend school or who are in danger of exclusion. The timetable is very well planned so that subject teachers visit to give specialist help: this raises standards and attendance levels. All aspects of provision are considerably enhanced by the excellent co-ordination of activities and by the unswerving commitment of the special needs team.

Sixth form

38. The school provides an excellent range of courses, at different levels, that are very suitable for the students staying on to the sixth form. A key feature of the curriculum is the way that students' previous experiences are evaluated and as a result, students are guided towards the most appropriate 'key skills' course that will enhance and enrich their studies. The school has a complex system of calculating the requirements for individual students to start courses, but these are highly effective in building up an individual portfolio of courses for each student. The school uses video conferencing for students who wish to study subjects that are not immediately available at the school. By using such innovative ideas, the school provides suitable courses for all students. Students in the sixth form have the same excellent opportunities to enrich their studies and personal development as other students in the school, and in taking advantage of them enrich the life of the other students by the role models they provide.

Care, guidance and support

The quality of guidance and support for students is outstanding. Health and safety arrangements are good. Very good account is taken of students' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are helped to become highly motivated to succeed because of the excellent climate for learning.
- Monitoring and support for students' personal development are particularly well developed, with the innovative use of ICT playing a key part.
- The two units give excellent support to students who face personal barriers to achievement arising from a wide range of needs and personal difficulties.

Commentary

39. Many strands of provision combine to bring about excellent systems for support, advice and guidance. Students and their parents are very happy with the support provided. Teachers place great emphasis on enabling students to make decisions for themselves, so they grow in responsibility for their own behaviour and achievement, and strive for success. Well-judged attention is given to positive encouragement; awards have a much higher profile than sanctions and help build the very positive climate for learning that pervades the school. The innovative use of ICT is another key factor; it enables teachers to closely monitor not only academic achievement, but also personal development. When personal problems arise, students know they can turn to teachers but they also show great confidence in the experienced school counsellor.

Example of outstanding practice

The use of ICT to monitor students' academic achievement and personal development.

All teachers have laptop computers that are linked via a wireless network. The network runs a bespoke program that allows teachers to record relevant information on an individual student and make it immediately available to all other staff. If a student is late for a lesson, for example, the teacher can check to see if this is part of an emerging pattern for the day and immediately alert the form tutor. Credits awarded for good effort are tracked most effectively, as are more negative aspects. So it is that tutors are able to give individual support based on up-to-date personal and academic records. More senior pastoral staff also play a full part in using this data, for instance to pick out individual students who will benefit from mentoring as their GCSE examinations approach.

40. Well-judged sanctions are used if individual behaviour becomes unacceptable but the main emphasis is on looking for the root causes of problems and then improving matters. Strategies for this are really notable. The learning resource centre is extremely well organised to help students overcome a wide range of disadvantages, whether these arise from behavioural difficulties or any other factor that makes it hard for them to cope with school life. Attention to detail is impressive. For instance, a sophisticated computer program for analysing an individual's behaviour in lessons is used to identify trigger points for problems. Strategies for improvement are then decided in discussion with the student. Another strength is the way subject teachers are timetabled to provide regular specialist input in the unit. Liaison with a wide range of external agencies is maintained, to further add to the breadth of support extended to students. Proper attention is given to child protection procedures and to meeting the particular needs of any children in public care.
41. Special educational needs staff offer very good personal support to students. The units are open at breaks and lunchtimes for students to work on computers or to consult staff. Individual education plans focus well on helping students to get on better at school and the annual

reviews for students with statements are very well organised. All staff are fully committed to making students feel valued, so boosting their self-esteem.

42. Students' own views are valued and built on in ways that promote their achievements. For instance, a current innovation is to give students questionnaires about their perceptions of their own learning styles, so that teachers can take account of these in planning for particular groups.
43. Careful attention is given to ensuring a safe environment for all school activities. Suitable attention is given to practising emergency evacuation of the premises, but formal evaluations of the practices could be carried out more consistently.

Sixth form

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school extends admirable support to students through excellent monitoring systems and readily available, well-targeted help and advice from teachers.
- Students are enabled to be confident independent learners.

Commentary

44. Guidance starts well before students join the sixth form, with explanations of the content of courses and the commitment required. Students' preferences for courses are canvassed and considerable efforts are made to provide the combinations they want. Careful application of entry criteria means students are not allowed to embark on courses unless they have a reasonable chance of success. Students are expected and encouraged from the start to take personal responsibility for their own work and success. They are enabled to work independently and at the same time are very confident to take the initiative and ask teachers for help when they need it. Judicious advice and guidance are at hand to keep them on track to achieve at every stage.
45. Highly developed monitoring systems and information databases ensure that form tutors can keep an overview of academic progress, as well as of any emerging problems, for instance with attendance. Through termly interviews with each student, they explore any individual difficulties and extend pertinent advice. The head of the sixth form makes a full contribution, as he can instantly access key academic and pastoral information about any of the students in his care. The school counsellor is a highly valued source of advice about wide-ranging personal concerns.
46. The daily personal and social development sessions with tutors contribute well to guidance. Students speak highly of the quality of support they receive over completing university applications. Careful attention is also given to advising students who choose other routes when they leave. Provision for careers advice enables all students to consider their own strengths and preferences and to take the initiative in conducting their own research.
47. Very good account is taken of students' views to help improve provision further; for instance, the present Year 12 chemistry course has been adjusted in the light of evaluations by the previous cohort.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Much careful attention is given to involving parents, resulting in a very good sense of partnership. Links with the community, and with other schools and educational establishments, are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses in the main school

- Systems for telling parents about students' work and progress ensure a very good flow of information.
- Liaison with feeder middle schools is outstanding in bringing about continuity in students' learning.
- A massive range of activities results from links with the community, and benefits all concerned.

Commentary

48. A really notable feature of links with parents is the way teachers evolved an innovative, very successful cycle of reports and meetings, taking careful account of parents' views. Reports go home every half term with grades for effort, achievement, targets for the subjects studied and the status of coursework. Any query about a report or any other cause is easily resolved, because meetings for students and parents with subject teachers are organised twice every term. Parents of any student can ask for an appointment and any member of staff may invite a parent to come. There is also an annual review day, which attracts a very high proportion of parents to discuss overall achievements with tutors.
49. The use of technology is another great strength. The school's website, although still developing, is already very helpful, with information ranging from a calendar of key dates to notes from a recent presentation by a high profile visiting speaker on study skills. Staff are always looking for more improvements. They are currently consulting parents about introducing automated text messages and emails to tell them of successes or problems or simply remind them of meetings.
50. Parents can share in celebrating students' successes; teachers make a point of sending letters home from time to time about particular achievements. Most parents readily get involved, but a few are less supportive, for instance about attendance. Additional links are established to meet particular needs; for instance, successful parenting classes are available through links with a nearby family centre. A small minority of parents think the flow of information could be even better. They are right, in that reports are less informative about progress in ICT and in citizenship than in other subjects. The school already knows about this and has improvements in hand.
51. Links between the special educational needs staff and parents are very good. Parents are kept closely informed of students' progress through telephone, letter, email and parents' evenings. They are involved in student assessments and consolidate at home the work students do on the movement and handwriting programmes. Links with middle schools and colleges are very good, too. The co-ordinator has a detailed knowledge of students before they arrive at the school, and the school works hard to ensure students receive appropriate careers advice.
52. The same thorough attention to detail is evident in links with other schools. Technology college status has been widely exploited to share expertise with other schools. Partnership with the three main feeder middle schools is extremely strong through regular, well-focused meetings of staff at all levels. These ensure continuity of learning when students transfer into Year 9. Links with a local college help to meet the needs of older students who can benefit from an appropriate alternative curriculum. Close links with Rigby Hall Special School have enabled its students to attend art and design, physical education and English courses to gain accreditation

at GCSE. The school counsellor meets all pupils before they join the school, which reduces risk of them having problems when they start Year 9.

53. Links with the community are extensively developed and exploited, giving both school and community opportunities for enrichment, and making very good contributions to students' personal development. Examples are numerous. Learn Direct and the local resource agency link exceptionally well with the school. These agencies make very effective use of the school's computer expertise and resources, which produces enormous benefits to the local community. Excellent contacts with local employers enhance the quality of careers education and guidance and enable all Year 10 to benefit from work experience. The school takes good advantage of work placements and vocational courses offered by the local community centre, and liaise with its staff who help meet students' needs for support. Students with special needs benefit from sailing at a local sailing centre.

Sixth form

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent links with the community underpin important aspects of provision, including students' outstandingly high participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
- Use of technology to link with partner schools results in valuable enhancements to the quality and breadth of the curriculum.
- The school makes very good efforts to gain parents' continuing involvement

Commentary

54. The excellent links with the local community significantly enhance students' opportunities for personal development. Examples of the interaction of school and community are extensive. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, through the service section, makes a very significant contribution to the breadth of students' experience and to the life of the local community. For example, sixth form students serve in the local charity shops, support the elderly and work in residential homes for the physically and mentally impaired. Local firms are involved in the mentoring of sixth form students; this is an expanding area for the school.
55. Links with other schools and colleges are developed just as impressively to benefit all involved. For example, video-conferencing links help share expertise in modern foreign languages and so make an important contribution to the breadth of curriculum available to students. The school in its turn readily contributes to other establishments. For instance, trainee teachers from a local university visit the business education department to observe good practice, and get input from the head of department about creating schemes of work.
56. Similar very good routines for informing and involving parents are in place to those in the main school. A presentation evening tells parents and students of the expectations and opportunities in the sixth form well before any decision is made about entry. Parents appreciate the half-termly reports and make good use of the frequent opportunities to meet with subject teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the school by the headteacher and other senior staff is excellent, as is the school's management. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff morale is very high because of the team spirit developed by key staff.
- The headteacher in particular provides an outstanding role model for others.
- Managers at all levels are intent on improving the school's performance in all aspects of its work.
- The level of innovation and consistency promoted in the school is outstanding.

Commentary

57. When the school was last inspected, standards were above average and most students were achieving well. Since that time the school has gone from strength to strength; standards are now well above average, and still improving, and achievement is very good in all years. The school now provides an outstanding quality of education for all its students. Such improvements do not come about by chance. The key to the school's success lies in the team spirit that is shared by all staff, teaching and non-teaching. There is a concerted will to continually do better for the students. The headteacher's philosophy is one of 'have a go'. Staff are encouraged to try new approaches; some are even seconded to carry out research for a period of time. So it is that a culture of innovation pervades the school. If a particular idea does not work there are no recriminations, so all staff feel that it is worthwhile to try something new, confident that they will have the full support of their senior managers.
58. There are very many examples of innovation in the school, from the way that ICT is used to track students' personal development, through the way that teachers take account of different learning styles, the approaches to dealing with vulnerable children and the way that students are grouped to make the most of their attributes, to the outstanding example set by the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. However, perhaps the most influential is the way that the school has used its status as a technology college to push ahead with developing the role of ICT in learning. All staff are completely confident using computers and are demanding more all the time. That the school can respond so well when it receives well below average funding is a reflection of the excellence of the financial management. Once again the school is innovative in its approach, costing every item down to the last paperclip to ensure that it makes the best possible use of the funds it receives. The school manages to boost its income to this well below average level by receiving unexpected grants and awards for its work. This unexpected income explains the current fairly high carry-over from one financial year to the next.
59. The awarding of technology college status has been extremely well managed. Its influence is felt across the school so that all staff can see the benefits. The school has been keen to be seen not as one that specialises in technology, but rather one that is using technology to provide the best possible education in all aspects of its work. The awards it has received for sports, the arts and all-round achievement, among others, have reinforced this.
60. The school's way of integrating monitoring, review and planning into a single quality assurance system is excellent. Clear systems are established to identify strengths and needs, and all planning stems from this. Targets are set for the school, subjects and teachers, that are used to build personal profiles of performance and development needs. This drives in-service training, the outcomes of which are rigorously monitored and evaluated so that learning is enhanced and students' achievement improves. Highly detailed observations of lessons are an integral part of the improvement process and it leads to meeting whole-school objectives and personal targets. Teachers appreciate the guidance and support that are given to them, and they make a significant contribution to the positive ethos that permeates the school. The information gained informs governors well in making whole-school decisions about recognising development needs. Teachers do not see evaluation as a threat, rather as a way of improving still further. The use of data to set the school's targets is quite exceptional. Information from a range of sources is taken to build up a profile of each individual student and then the school aims for the highest possible target predicted for the student. In many cases the students do

not quite make it, but all do much better than would usually be expected. The impact of the quality assurance systems is observed in the remarkable level of consistency that the school achieves in all it does.

61. The governors play a very important part in leading the school forward. Unusually, it is the governors who set the school's priorities through the annual targets that they set for the headteacher. These targets then feed down through all of the levels of management in the school to the individual member of staff, so all are playing a full part in meeting the school's priorities. The one weakness is the governors' failure to ensure that the school is providing a daily act of collective worship.
62. Overall, the leadership and management of special educational needs, including the units, are outstanding. Students achieve so well because every effort is made to provide new activities to help students learn more easily. Team spirit within the area is excellent. Since the last inspection, improvement is very good. Achievement and teaching are better and provision is more extensive.
63. The school's improvement and its continuing success have been brought about as a result of the outstanding quality of the headteacher. He has succeeded in bring the very best out of the staff. He is an exceptional role model to other teachers in his teaching and the way he carries out the same duties as other members of staff. An excellent senior management team who fulfil their duties to a very high standard supports him. The leadership in all subjects and areas of the school's work is at least good, and in the majority is very good or excellent. There is a much greater clarity of vision than is usually found, because every member of staff shares and contributes to the vision, and it is the students who benefit.

Sixth form

The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent; its governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Exactly the same strengths are apparent in the sixth form as in the main school.

Commentary

64. The improvement in the sixth form has mirrored that in the main school, because the systems that are used are the same as those in the main school. There is one area of management that stands out in the sixth form, however, and that is the way that laptops have been made available to all students. The many merits of this approach are explained throughout the report, but the way it is managed is also innovative. The laptops are provided to students on a leasing basis. This may appear costly on the surface, but students gain the advantage of wireless access to broadband technology without having to pay a subscription. The monthly cost to students is only the same as the monthly cost of broadband subscription, and they get full use of the laptop for 24 hours a day, with instant replacement if there are any problems. The school does subsidise the cost to students, but still works within its budget and is presently negotiating to purchase the old leased laptops at the end of the year so that all Year 11 students can be offered one.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3926836	Balance from previous year	472797

Total expenditure	3991067
Expenditure per student	3323

Balance carried forward to the next	408566
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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**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement, teaching and learning are good throughout the school.
- Standards in speaking, listening and reading are relatively high.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Students of average attainment have relatively weak skills in writing.

Examination results

65. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9 results were above average. Results improved rapidly until 2001, when they were well above average; 2003 results showed a marginal decline. In 2003 GCSE results in English were above average; in English literature they were well above average.

Standards and achievement

66. Students' above average results in the tests at the end of Year 9 were better than those that would be expected from their results at the end of Year 6. Students' skills in speaking and listening are above the national average and are a strength throughout Years 9 to 11. By Year 9 most students are willing to take part in discussions and accept their responsibility to make a positive contribution and to listen to the views of others. Most students express themselves clearly in writing. Higher attainers have the range and flexibility of language to be able to adapt what they produce for a range of different audiences. However, for some middle and lower attaining students, particularly amongst boys, handwriting is poor and their work contains errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Standards of reading are a relative strength. Students understand what they have read and the vast majority can read independently.
67. The majority of students in Years 10 and 11 are articulate, speak in turn, listen alertly and are capable of challenging the views of others in a considered and respectful manner. Higher attaining students produce written work of very high quality, which is full, well organised and imaginative. However, a significant proportion of middle attaining students does not improve their basic skills as well as might be expected. Standards in reading are high, with many students having considerable insight into what they have studied.

Teaching and learning

68. When teaching is most effective, teachers have high expectations of themselves and of their students. Teachers arrive with carefully planned lessons, a good knowledge of their students' capabilities and well-chosen resources that enable them to enliven their lessons and engage the interest of students. They frequently display material to the class using their laptops and this process also works effectively because teachers are, again, well prepared. Students are expected to arrive punctually, to behave well and to contribute positively to lessons. All this means that the tone in lessons is one of mutual respect between students and teacher and a certain dignity prevails. The environment for learning is, therefore, very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and the requirements of the courses they are teaching. This is fully shared with students, with the result that the vast majority of students know the grade they are currently achieving and many know what they need to do if they are to improve. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and this means students concentrate well and so their achievement is high. Teachers attempt to meet the individual needs of students and are ready to be flexible in the way in which they group or support students to achieve this end.
69. When lessons are less effective, the pace of the lesson is too rapid, with the result that students do not adequately understand the task and so make relatively slow progress and sometimes become restless. Whilst support staff are usually deployed well, in some instances their work could be better targeted to more effectively support students' needs. In more effective lessons students are clearly shown how to complete a given task: in less effective lessons students are told what they should do. Most of the marking is of high quality but there is inconsistency. When students' work is not marked regularly, or errors are overlooked, students do not know how to improve and can become negligent.
70. The use of ICT in teaching and learning is much better than usually seen. The department intranet is a very valuable resource, particularly for students preparing for GCSE.

Leadership and management

71. Overall, above average standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. The curriculum has been widened in Years 10 and 11, with media studies being available as an option. The use of ICT has increased greatly and has improved students' understanding of how to communicate more effectively. Their learning experiences have also been enriched because of teachers' skilful use of the technology, and this helps to create enthusiasm for studying.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

72. Standards of literacy are above average. Most students are articulate and confident speakers and there are ample opportunities for them to further develop these skills in most subjects. Students learn and use subject-specific vocabulary. Most read with good understanding, and are able to find information using appropriate reference materials. Most students can express themselves clearly in writing.
73. Students are provided with a sound range of opportunities to use their skills in literacy. In particular, the school's emphasis upon students playing an active role in lessons means they grow in confidence, become increasingly articulate and extend their vocabularies. Opportunities are also provided for students to conduct their own research. However, in other respects practice is inconsistent. For example, there is considerable variation as to how frequently teachers mark students' written work and the extent to which they pay attention to accuracy and the quality of expression when they do so.

Modern foreign languages

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

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very carefully monitored and compared to national standards so that both teachers and students know what improvements are needed.
- There is much consistency of approach and teachers regularly share their ideas, trying out and evaluating new approaches carefully.
- Higher attaining students are performing very well in French.
- There is still some work to do to ensure that the performance of boys matches that of the girls.

Examination results

74. In French, GCSE results were above average in 2003 and have risen steadily over the past three years. In German, GCSE results were average and have risen significantly for the past three years. In both subjects girls do better than boys and the gap is much larger than would be expected nationally.

Standards and achievement

75. By the end of Year 9, students are working above the level that would be expected of them nationally in French, which represents good achievement. All students also learn German in Year 9 and they are working at a level that is below average but this is because they have just started the language. Their achievement is therefore only satisfactory despite some good teaching. Students' speaking skills are slightly less well developed than their writing skills, but in French most can manage three tenses and give their opinions on a range of topics. In German most students are still working in one tense as they have not had sufficient time to do more than this, although some of the higher attainers are able to use accurate grammar and word order and are beginning to put complex sentences together. Students are mostly confident when listening to tapes on familiar topics and can understand passages of written French or German. At this stage there is little noticeable difference in the performance of boys and girls. Students with special educational needs make good progress because the teachers are well aware of their needs and plan well to help them, giving them carefully designed tasks. Higher attaining students make good progress as they have many opportunities to work on challenging activities and are continually encouraged to improve their work.
76. By the end of Year 11, students' skills are above average in French; they are achieving well because they are taught well. In German, standards are average because students have not been learning the language for as long; nevertheless they are achieving well. In both languages a group of lower attaining students, containing many boys, does not achieve as well as they

might because they only have two lessons in Year 10 and one in Year 11. Speaking is the weakest skill, especially for the lower and middle ability boys who often have poor pronunciation and fluency. The department has identified this as an area that needs attention, and measures such as ensuring that students get sufficient practice in class are beginning to have an effect. Other measures such as timetabling most students to speak with the French foreign language assistant, and ensuring students have copies of examination practice booklets, are also having a beneficial effect. Higher attainers, especially the girls in French, do particularly well in writing as they enjoy the opportunity to do coursework, producing some good quality work, but are also beginning to develop their spoken skills. Students have very well developed listening skills as they have plenty of practice listening to tapes. Reading is developed well in class and students are beginning to have access to a wider range of extended and authentic texts.

Teaching and learning

77. Learning is good in both key stages because students rise to the challenges they are regularly given and enjoy lessons in which they are often expected to complete a lot of work. Students know what they will be expected to have done by the end of the lessons and get on with their work purposefully. Most teachers use French or German to explain tasks which means that students are exposed to a lot of language and develop good listening skills, although a few teachers are less skilled at explaining clearly and use English too often. Teachers support the lower attainers well; they provide carefully structured lessons, which build up students' understanding and use a range of activities, including games and songs, that motivate students. Relationships between staff and students are very good; students know that they are expected to work hard and teachers deal with minor instances of lack of attention well. ICT is used well to give students access to authentic materials, such as the German national railway website. Teachers also use ICT very effectively to make their presentations of teaching points clear.
78. Teachers plan lessons that have clear objectives and use carefully selected resources. Nevertheless, occasionally teachers do not always allow students sufficient time to practise language in pairs, leaving this until the last five minutes of the lesson. Students' work is marked and students are told exactly what they have to do to improve when writing, but feedback to students on their oral work is less consistently good. Too often mistakes in pronunciation are left unchecked and students are not always encouraged to speak from memory or at any length, although there were some extremely good examples of higher attaining students being given very clear guidance about how to improve all aspects of their oral work in French. Some students, especially boys of middle and lower ability, say they find revising difficult as they do not keep their notes systematically.

Leadership and management

79. The department now provides a much better quality of education than that at the time of the previous inspection; results have risen steadily in French and very significantly in German and the procedures for assessing students' progress are now very good. Examination results are very carefully monitored and compared to national standards so that both teachers and students know what improvements are needed and there has been a determined and very effective drive to raise results in German. There is much consistency of approach and teachers regularly share their ideas, trying out and evaluating new approaches carefully. The curriculum has been adapted, for example by introducing a coursework element to improve writing skills, and this has also contributed to the rise in results at GCSE.

MATHEMATICS

Overall the provision in mathematics is **very good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do much better in the Year 9 national tests than expected, given their standards on entry to the school.
- Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
- The head of department provides very good leadership and management of a strong department, with a clear vision to raise standards.
- Assessment of students' learning and understanding is very good and is used well to inform planning and targets.

Examination results

80. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well above average and were similar to those of 2002. The GCSE results in 2003 were above average, though lower than in 2002. This was due to students' weaker performance in their coursework. Steps have now been taken to remedy this.

Standards and achievement

81. By the end of Year 9, students' numerical skills are well above average. Higher attaining students can find the n^{th} term for linear and quadratic sequences and use trial and improvement methods well. The lower attainers can present data in pictograms, tally charts and bar charts and interpret such data easily. In Year 11, higher attaining students can calculate the roots of a quadratic equation by completing the square as well as by formula. The lower attainers can multiply out negative numbers within brackets and use the answer to solve equations.

Teaching and learning

82. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of mathematics. Lessons have a very brisk, business-like pace. Lessons are planned very carefully with effective starter activities linked to the main topic of the lesson. Students respond well to this format and make good or better gains in their learning. Teachers often share this planning with the students. This helps the students understand the relevance of their learning and the achievements to be made. However, more challenge could be built into lessons for individual higher attaining students to achieve their potential. Teaching is better in Year 9 than in Years 10 and 11, because Year 9 teachers more often insist on students relaying their understanding to them, allowing the teacher to see who is achieving and who needs support.
83. Students are involved in self-assessment of their learning; they understand how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. Very good displays in classrooms and corridors engage students and support both their literacy and their numeracy skills.

Leadership and management

84. Very good leadership is provided by the head of department who is also a very good role model with a clear vision to raise standards within the department. The very good management results in a strong, efficient department, in which the teachers work hard as a team with clearly delegated roles. Very good planning and development take place alongside rigorous self-review to drive the department forward and raise standards. Very good use of assessment data is made to track students' performance, set targets and inform the planning and monitoring needs within the department. The monitoring of teaching is also very good, with written feedback provided and targets set for teachers.

Mathematics across the curriculum

85. Standards of basic mathematics are well above average across the school. The teaching of mathematics as a basic skill in all subjects across the curriculum is satisfactory. The mathematics department has delivered a half-day training session to other subjects on the teaching and learning of mathematics and has carried out an audit of departmental provision. However, the co-ordination and support given to other subjects are insufficient to raise the teaching of mathematics in other subjects above a satisfactory level.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do much better in GCSE science than might be expected in relation to their standards when they enter the school.
- Teachers use a wide variety of imaginative strategies to ensure that students are always actively learning.
- The head of department provides very good leadership and the team is constantly seeking to raise students' achievement.
- In Years 10 and 11 there is an excellent range of courses, so all students can follow a course which is right for them.
- Teaching in physics, although satisfactory, is not as well organised as teaching in biology and chemistry.

Examination results

86. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, results were well above the national average, continuing the steady upward trend in these results. Results in the 2003 GCSE science examinations were well above average. Results in double and single award science were similar to those for 2002 but, in the three separate science subjects, there was a higher percentage of A and A* grades in 2003 than in 2002.

Standards and achievement

87. Students enter Year 9 with standards in science that are above average for their age. They do well in Year 9 and, by the end of that year, standards are well above average. At the end of

Year 11, students gain much better GCSE results than might be expected, given their standards when they joined the school. Hence their achievement by the age of 16 is very good.

88. Students did much better than expected in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, given their results when they were in Year 6. All students, including the lowest attainers, have at least a satisfactory basic knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. In higher sets, students regularly achieve standards that are well above average and, sometimes, very high. Most students have good literacy skills. However, lower attainers find it difficult to express their understanding clearly when writing answers to unfamiliar questions. The department's strong emphasis on the precise meaning of key words is beneficial to students in overcoming this weakness.
89. Students' skills in investigation work generally match their standards in other aspects of science. However, there is some scope for improvement in GCSE investigative coursework because few of the higher attainers gain maximum marks. The department has rightly re-vamped its investigation timetable and planning to gain even better results from this aspect of the GCSE examinations.

Teaching and learning

90. A major strength of the teaching is teachers' willingness to use new and exciting techniques to ensure that students are fully involved in the lesson and actively learning throughout. Another strength lies in the use of 'starting point' activities at the beginning of each topic to identify the level of students' understanding. This enables the teacher to proceed, particularly in Year 9, without unnecessary repetition of work covered in the middle school. It also helps to identify where there are gaps in students' understanding that need to be filled. Where teaching is at its best, the lessons are very tightly planned and organised so no time is wasted and a very good pace is maintained; students simply do not have the opportunity to lose concentration.
91. Teachers use some very interesting and challenging activities to start and finish the lesson and always make the aims of the lesson clear to students at the start, so that they know what they are expected to learn. The use of computer projectors in this respect is excellent: starter activities are often on screen when students arrive to enable a quick start; aims are given due importance and can be referred to at intervals during the lesson; instructions are clearly visible for activities to remind students of the correct procedure.
92. Teaching in physics, although satisfactory, has some weaknesses that are not found in biology or chemistry. In lessons, students occasionally work in groups that are too large to give everyone a chance to participate. Students' notes are sometimes unclear or lack important information.
93. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are better than in Year 9. By the time they reach Year 10, students have become accustomed to teachers' high expectations of what they can achieve, their concentration is more intense and lessons can proceed at a faster pace. In Years 10 and 11 the department offers courses in the three separate science subjects, double award applied science and single award science, in addition to the double award science course followed by the majority of students. This excellent range of courses allows all students to follow a science course that precisely meets their needs.

Leadership and management

94. The head of department leads by example, both in the outstanding quality of her teaching and her enthusiasm for the subject. She is strongly supported by both teachers and technicians. All work very well together as a team and share the commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of students' learning and their eventual achievement. The department has very rigorous arrangements for monitoring all aspects of its work. When weaknesses are identified,

appropriate action is taken to overcome them. The department recognises that more observation of each other's lessons would be beneficial, in order to share more effectively the many very good ideas that different teachers have to offer.

95. GCSE examination results were average at the time of the previous inspection. They are now well above average. Hence the department has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

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

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Excellent

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Year 9 achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Excellent leadership has resulted in excellent progress being made since the previous inspection.
- The school has excellent ICT facilities that promote excellent use of ICT across the school.
- The achievement of students following the applied GCSE is satisfactory rather than good because they do not have enough lessons.

Examination results

96. The school has appealed against the examination results in 2003; the appeal has been upheld but the new results have not yet been provided by the examination board.

Standards and achievement

97. By the end of Year 9, students' practical skills are well above average. They are very confident users of ICT. They transpose information across different software applications with ease. Students have a high level of understanding of web page construction, modelling techniques and presentation software. Their understanding of the theory associated with the subject is well above average. Lower attainers make the same very good progress as others because teachers match the work very well to the needs of these students.
98. By the end of Year 11, students' skills are above average. They produce high quality presentations and use email with ease. Their ability to use spreadsheets and databases is above average. Above all else, students have the depth of knowledge and understanding to enable them to succeed. Two groups of students take the applied GCSE in ICT; the achievement of these students is satisfactory as good quality teaching is negated by insufficient curriculum time.

Teaching and learning

99. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject; they use this exceedingly well to really challenge students and ask searching questions. Teachers do not accept superficial answers, even from lower attaining students. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and also how students should behave.
100. In Years 10 and 11, teachers know the requirements of the syllabuses very well; this enables them to provide examples of good practice and inform students how they can improve. When teaching is less than good, teachers do not ensure all students are listening to instructions, so some students do not know how to proceed.

Leadership and management

101. Excellent leadership enabled the school to be successful in its bid to become a specialist technology college. The department has made excellent progress since the previous inspection: from a satisfactory position through to a position of strength. Standards are much improved as a result of very good teaching.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

102. Standards of competence in ICT are well above those usually seen. The use of ICT in other areas of the curriculum is excellent. The ratio of students to computers is far better than the national average. This allows specialist ICT lessons to take place but also enables students to practise key skills across the curriculum. ICT is used very effectively in areas such as science where students use data-logging equipment to aid their investigations.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

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

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching results in students achieving well.
- The use of assessment, although satisfactory, is inconsistent and not fully informing on students' progress.

Examination results

103. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were average, but standards are improving and are above average in the current Year 11.

Standards and achievement

104. By the end of Year 9, students have a good range of skills and knowledge of topics, such as the weather and climate of the British Isles and about the environmental effects of global warming. They develop research skills well. Re-drafted written work is above average, but in

some books work is below average because it is untidy and illustrations lack clarity. By the end of Year 11 students build on their map reading skills and apply them well in GCSE coursework. High attaining students for example used maps to demonstrate the area of influence of the market in meeting local needs, but others do not use illustrative work enough to support their findings. Students are knowledgeable on topics such as regional flooding and earthquakes in Japan, but do not use examples enough to link theoretical knowledge to places. ICT skills are good and used well in GCSE coursework.

Teaching and learning

105. Students benefit by being taught by experienced teachers and this leads to them achieving well. In Year 9 the aims of lessons are clear and students know what is expected of them. Teachers manage students very well; learning proceeds in a brisk and orderly manner and leads to them reaching above average standards. In the most effective lessons students are actively engaged in learning, such as group-work resulting in good quality journalistic-style reporting. Test results give good indications of achievement, but the marking of books provides insufficient information on the quality of the content and how to improve. In Years 10 and 11, students achieve well because of the good guidance teachers give them, particularly the resources for lower attaining students. ICT is used well in some lessons, but for some lessons, access to enough computers for the whole class is difficult.

Leadership and management

106. The subject is well led and managed and the morale of students and staff is high. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly in raising standards.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Year 9 because teachers make lessons interesting and challenging.
- The proportion of students choosing to continue with history to the age of 16 is twice the national average.
- Students achieve very well in Year 11 because teachers build very thorough preparation for GCSE into challenging and enjoyable lessons.
- Monitoring of the progress of students of all attainment levels in Year 11 is very good so all do very well in GCSE examinations.

Examination results

107. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were well above average, with a significantly higher proportion of the highest grades gained than the national average. The results reflect a trend of results that is rising at a greater rate than nationally.

Standards and achievement

108. In Year 9, students develop their skills in using sources of evidence to interpret events well and an above average number of them write fluent answers. Students' analytical and oral skills are well above average.
109. The proportion of each Year 9 group that opts to continue with history beyond 14 is far higher than the national average and students gain GCSE results that are well above average. Higher attaining students write very fluently and show close observation of detail and very good selection of supporting evidence when evaluating, for instance, two contrasting political cartoons on the New Deal in the USA in the 1930s. The work of lower attaining students, on an SHP (Schools History Project) GCSE course that appeals strongly to their interests, shows them to be achieving equally well and gaining results that are better than average for such students.

Teaching and learning

110. In Year 9, students benefit from being taught by enthusiastic teachers who expect high standards of work and behaviour. Teachers explain clearly the aims of lessons and they employ a good range of learning strategies. Lessons move at a lively pace and students relish the challenge that is presented in lessons.
111. By the end of Year 11, students develop very well their skills in organising and presenting coursework because they receive very good instruction from teachers. In addition to providing lessons that retain the same effective pace and challenge that is so evident lower down the school, teachers assess standards of work accurately and provide very good written feedback to students. Such informed assessment and careful analysis of results resulted in the adoption of the SHP course on which students of lower attainment gain much better GCSE grades than they did previously. Consequently, all students achieve very well.

Leadership and management

112. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The enthusiastic head of history has a clear vision that is reflected in development plans that are clearly focused on the school's aim of continuously raising students' achievement. That vision is shared and consistently put into practice by all history teachers. Standards have improved significantly so progress made since the previous inspection is very good.

Religious education

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

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well in Year 9.
- Students are interested in their work because teachers involve them actively in their lessons.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students who are challenged to achieve well.

- There is insufficient marking to support the development of students' literacy skills or to monitor progress.

Examination results

113. All students in Year 11 follow the short GCSE course and the opportunity for accreditation supports their effort and motivation. Results in the GCSE short course are above average, as they were in 2002.

Standards and achievement

114. Students in Year 9 demonstrate good knowledge and use of research skills. They understand the suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust and the questions that such a tragedy provoked, although their understanding of the concept of forgiveness is at an early stage. They have a good understanding of the problems surrounding conservation and can offer a range of actions that would combat them. Higher attaining students recognise the concept of stewardship and identify the link with Genesis. Most students simply recognise the error in damaging the world. Students recognise the links between belief and action. Students are developing their specialist vocabulary well.
115. Students in Year 11 have a confident grasp of the arguments for and against the existence of God and are able to explain the creation theories that support this belief. Evaluation and comparison of the theories are superficial, but students have a confident use of specialist terminology, and higher attaining students refer well to the philosophers who originated the theories studied. In small group activities, boys are more reluctant to analyse what they learn, preferring to leave the organisation and discussion to the girls. Boys record what is learnt, and in response to direct questioning demonstrate that they have understood. In whole-class activities, however, boys respond well to questioning, often taking a more active part than the girls. Students with special educational needs are achieving well because of the support of their peers and their participation in the active learning of the class which enables all students to develop their understanding at their own pace. Written work shows that students have a good understanding of the work they cover, although opportunities to develop their ideas further are limited, despite the very good teaching, because of the limited number of lessons that are allocated to the course.

Teaching and learning

116. Teachers plan very well and this enables them to use a range of activities within a lesson, and so provide for students with different learning styles. Students are interested in their work because teachers involve students actively in their lessons. Teachers have high expectations of themselves and their students, and their enthusiasm for the subject is conveyed to them. Teachers make good use of group work to enable students to learn from each other and develop their understanding through the sharing of ideas. Because lessons proceed at a fast but unhurried pace, teachers and students have the time to review the lessons, and to reinforce what has been learnt. Teachers make opportunities for students to work with specialist visitors who provide them with different viewpoints and activities that enrich their learning. Teachers have developed the school religious education website, which enables students to have access to material outside of the lessons. They encourage students to research more widely, and to interview representatives from different faiths. A key assessment task has been developed for each term in Year 9 so that teachers can identify students' attainment; however, marking does not support the development of literacy and is insufficient to monitor the progress of students. Students are encouraged to evaluate their work and identify strengths and areas for improvement. This raises their achievement as they become more aware of the criteria for success. The good use of supplementary questioning by teachers enables higher attaining students to achieve a higher level of responses.

Leadership and management

117. The leadership of the department has high expectations and is determined to raise the achievement of all. All students now have access to an accredited course and the additional support given to students in the Brookside unit ensures they can achieve success. A strong team has been developed that includes the students, and which has provided a clear and positive identity for the department. Teachers are encouraged to develop their teaching skills and share good practice, and innovation is welcomed. The department has moved a long way in a relatively short time and has been successful in the steps it has taken.

TECHNOLOGY

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

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

Leadership	Very Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in food and textiles technology, because of the very good teaching students receive.
- Girls do much better than boys overall, because teaching in resistant materials and systems and control is only satisfactory and these subjects are mostly studied by boys.
- The very good leadership provides a clear vision for the subject.
- The breadth of the curriculum and the wide variety of trips and extra-curricular activities provide an enriching experience for all students.

Examination results

118. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were above average. Girls performed much better than boys did overall. Boys performed much worse in design and technology than in most of their other subjects.

Standards and achievement

119. By the end of Year 9, students' designing and making skills are above average. This represents good achievement given students' standards upon entry to the school. Students use a variety of tools and equipment accurately and with confidence in all material areas; however, students are not given enough opportunity to use designing or thinking skills in resistant materials and this restricts their achievement. In contrast, standards are very high in textiles and food technology.
120. By the end of Year 11, standards of designing and making are above average. However, there is a significant difference between how well students achieve in the different material areas. Students' achievement is satisfactory in resistant materials and systems and control but it is very good in food and textiles. Where standards are high, students' work is consistently thorough with detailed analysis and evaluations. Making skills are above average in all material areas; students of all levels of attainment develop accurate and precise products and students with special educational needs and those of low attainment achieve particularly well in engineering and manufacturing. Good use is made of ICT in all material areas and it is having a positive impact on standards.

Teaching and learning

121. In Year 9 students are taught well by knowledgeable and committed teachers. Lessons are usually well paced and have clear learning objectives. Students enjoy their lessons because teachers have carefully planned activities that capture the interest of students of all abilities. However, in resistant materials the projects students undertake are based too much around the acquisition of making skills and as a result students' designing is too superficial. In contrast, the approach to teaching textiles is very creative and students' products develop from clear research and analysis. Students' work is regularly marked although the quality of teachers' comments varies considerably across the department. In Years 10 and 11, teachers use their own knowledge and experience to challenge and extend students. In food and textiles, teaching is very good because students are set consistently challenging activities that engage and interest them; students work at great pace and learn very well as a result. In systems and control, however, the lessons lack pace and are not interesting enough to really motivate to the students.

Leadership and management

122. The strong team ethos and commitment to improvement have improved teaching in Years 10 and 11 and, together with the close monitoring and evaluation of students' performance, have improved standards significantly. A range of effective policies has been developed that ensure efficient and effective teaching and learning; however, there is a significant difference in the quality of teaching and learning between material areas. The school has made a significant investment in ICT and this is having a positive impact upon the quality of students' work, particularly in graphics and industrial technology. All students benefit from a wide range of enriching activities such as educational trips and visits; students have also achieved great success in competitions such as the national future chef competition.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and contributes to very high achievement.
- There is a good range of experiences for students.
- Planning, assessment and organisation are excellent.
- Accommodation is cramped when there are large classes.

Examination results

123. In 2003 results in GCSE were well above average. These results have been maintained over the past three years.

Standards and achievement

124. By the end of Year 9 students have very good skills in drawing and painting. They gain a good knowledge of colour theory and use colour well to express mood and character, especially in portraits. They produce good work in point perspective and have a secure knowledge of the key features of landscape drawing. Their standards are improved by very good studies of the work of major artists across a range of cultures. This also makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
125. By Year 11, students research and develop their work in very good depth and detail. Work in design is particularly good and is used to good effect in block and silk screen printing. There is a good range of work in three dimensions, including light sculpture, carving in plaster and mask making. There is exquisite work in jewellery, inspired by natural forms and the Art Nouveau movement. The artist in residence has made a very good contribution to three-dimensional provision by engaging Year 11 students in large-scale light sculptures based on the theme of endangered animals, including the 'Bromsgrove Boar'.

Teaching and learning

126. The teachers have very good knowledge and expertise in the subject and have very high expectations of their students. Planning is excellent, with work structured in clear stages so students know how to progress from one stage to the next and therefore work with a sense of purpose. The teachers are highly organised so maximum use is made of the 50-minute lessons. They give very good demonstrations of standard techniques in art, especially in drawing and painting, printing and point perspective. All students get very good individual, appropriate support in lessons and all make equally good progress. Students in all years show enjoyment in the subject and work seriously.

Leadership and management

127. There is very good vision for improving standards further, especially for boys. There is very good teamwork. All aspects are well documented. Assessment is exemplary in its effectiveness. It is simple, clear and structured to evaluate all aspects of students' work in detail. It is used well to inform students on how they can improve at frequent points in each unit of work. It makes a significant contribution to the very high standards. There are inspiring exhibitions of high quality paintings throughout the school. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Provision for three-dimensional work has improved significantly, as has the provision for students to experiment in individual, creative and imaginative ways. The scale of students' work is still affected by the small classrooms and the large classes as reported previously. Although there is very good use of ICT in some projects, there is limited provision within the department for day-to-day use by individuals.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and areas for improvement

- Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching.
- Very good leadership has resulted in very good progress since the previous inspection.
- The lack of up-to-date computers and headphones is restricting the progress of students in Years 10 and 11.
- Exciting and innovative ICT teaching resources have raised standards and allowed all students to achieve very well.

Examination results

128. GCSE results in 2003 were above average.

Standards and achievement

129. Students have well-developed performance skills. They are confident composers and create well-structured short pieces that display a good understanding of musical elements. Overall they achieve very well. Although students get opportunities to use electronic keyboards, they do not have enough access to computers with music software and do not use the few multi-tracking keyboards available to enhance their work as much as they should. Their listening skills are not as strong because they do not have much chance to really focus their listening during lessons due to the lack of headphones and the level of background noise. By the end of Year 11 students can perform and compose very well. The more musically talented are very good performers and get lots of opportunities to take part in ensembles throughout the school. Students use technical language very well when describing the music they hear and study. Theory and appraising work is less developed but still shows a good understanding of the examination requirements.

Teaching and learning

130. Students learn very well because the teaching is very good. Lessons are planned thoroughly and teachers expertly use ICT to demonstrate musical ideas and provide very clear examples. The pace of lessons is brisk and lively which keeps the students focused and enthusiastic about their learning. Students enjoy music lessons because teachers ensure lessons have a wide range of activities that capture the students' interest. Teachers expect students to behave and achieve well; they drive the pace forward to keep the students motivated. Teachers carefully modify work so that all students achieve very well. Students in Years 10 and 11 work really hard in lessons without relying on the teacher to keep them focused. Resources are used very well but there is a lack of up-to-date computers with music software so students are not able to achieve the highest results in their examination coursework; there are plans in place to address this weakness. Targets are shared well with students so they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

131. Leadership and management are characterised by a clear vision for driving the subject forward. Day-to-day management is underpinned by highly sophisticated ICT systems that ensure high standards are achieved. Assessment procedures are rigorous in Years 10 and 11, but are not accurate in Year 9 so students' standards have been significantly overestimated. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards are higher, the number of teachers has increased and quality improved, and the accommodation is now far better.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in all years as a result of good teaching.
- An outstanding extra-curricular programme offers opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel in school and beyond.
- Very good leadership provides a clear vision for the subject.
- Teacher assessments for girls at the end of Year 9 are over-generous.

Examination results

132. The 2003 GCSE examination results were average.

Standards and achievement

133. By Year 9, standards in games and dance are average, reflecting good achievement in relation to students' starting point on entering the school. Students of all abilities achieve well in basketball; girls also achieve well in hockey, and boys in football.

134. By Year 11, standards are still average in the Entry Level Certificate course, and achievement is satisfactory overall. This is because students begin to learn new activities and there is insufficient opportunity for them to master the skills, given the constraints of the unsatisfactory indoor accommodation. Standards in the GCSE course are above average and students are achieving well. Most students show a good grasp of theoretical aspects in their written work. Standards in extra-curricular sport are very high, reflected in students' many achievements in team games in county and regional competitions. Many students take part in these extra activities, which raises their overall levels of achievement.

Teaching and learning

135. Teaching is knowledgeable, enthusiastic and motivating. High standards are expected and received, reflected in high levels of participation, standards of dress and behaviour in lessons. Students have very good attitudes to the subject; they put good physical effort into their work and support extra-curricular activities well. A strong feature is the way that students are given a share of responsibility for their learning, with many opportunities to experience leadership and co-operative group work. It is the level of challenge and the focus on what students are learning

that distinguish the very good teaching from the good. The best learning occurs when teaching combines a lively pace, challenge and high expectations, and there are constant demands on students to do better.

Leadership and management

136. Very good leadership provides a clear vision and direction for the subject. Innovative planning, based on raising standards of attainment, provides a wide range of opportunities not least the outstanding extra-curricular programme, that are open to all students. Monitoring of the subject's performance is not tight enough, with a few weaknesses to be seized upon and put right. Assessment data is used effectively to set individual targets and to plot progress; however, assessments for girls at the end of Year 9 are over-generous. The school is well on the way towards achieving the aim of the national strategy for 75 per cent of students to have two hours a week of quality physical education by 2006. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection; standards and teaching have improved.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Not applicable	Above average
Achievement	Not applicable	Good
Teaching and learning	Not applicable	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching brings about effective learning for students of all levels of attainment.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and share their enthusiasm for the subject with the students
- The department is very well led.
- Business links are not strong enough to enhance understanding of current business practices.

Examination results

137. Results in 2003 were above average and improved upon those in 2002. Girls have always done very well at the higher A* and A grades. However, since a change of course, boys are now outperforming girls at these higher grades. Some Year 10 students also do well at AS modules, with some Year 11 students taking the full AS award. These higher attaining students are encouraged to take these courses in tandem with their GCSE.

Standards and achievement

138. Students' knowledge and skills are beyond what might typically be expected. Students generally work to their capacity and respond well to challenges. They show a clear understanding of business ideas and processes, such as methods of production, payment systems and motivational techniques. Notes are carefully written and students communicate confidently and accurately.

Teaching and learning

139. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and quickly establish a purposeful atmosphere for learning. They prepare their work thoroughly. Teachers' enthusiasm and commitment inspire students, who respond well to the challenges set for them. The range of methods used is varied and students are therefore able to develop different ways of working. Assessment is well organised. Teachers make effective comments on students' written work so that they know how well they are doing and how to further improve their work. The intranet and Internet are integral parts of the teaching of business studies; they enhance the quality of the learning experience in the classroom.

Leadership and management

140. The new head of department has a strong drive for improvement and a clear sense of direction, ensuring that all teachers share a common purpose. Management of the department has been based on a collaborative approach so that all the teachers are involved in the development and implementation of departmental targets. Staff are now clear about their roles and responsibilities. Target setting and the monitoring of achievement are well established for individual students. Changing the examination syllabus has increased higher level attainment for boys and more able students of both sexes further extend their learning by accessing both AS and GCSE courses in tandem in both Years 10 and 11.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship and personal and social development are well integrated. Most subjects make a good contribution to the development of citizenship.

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership, management and teamwork are responsible for the rapid development of citizenship.
- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' work is monitored but students are not always made aware of their progress.

Examination results

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

Standards and achievement

142. By the end of Year 9, students have average skills of enquiry and knowledge about becoming informed citizens. They have a broad understanding of the issues and the consequences for governments created by environmental issues such as deforestation and acid rain. By the end of Year 11, students possess above average skills of citizenship; achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. This is a result of a very well planned enrichment programme for citizenship. By the end of Year 11, students have successfully investigated issues such as the struggle for human rights, legality of drugs and prejudice and bias. The supporting enrichment programme,

such as the Malachi Trust and Eisteddfod, gives good opportunities for practical reinforcement of citizenship for a significant number of students. Students show good listening and discussion skills. Many students support their views with good reasons.

Teaching and learning

143. The long-term planning and lesson planning are good, which ensures consistency of teaching by form tutors. Teaching is characterised by very good challenge and pace. Year 10 lessons on sexuality successfully challenge students about their changing role and acceptance of different relationships. This ensures that they become better-informed citizens about world issues. In such lessons teachers successfully encourage students to share opinions with others and develop their own ideas. However, in the majority of subjects in Year 9, citizenship is not made sufficiently explicit. Consequently students are often not aware that they are becoming better-informed citizens.

Leadership and management

144. The assistant head provides very clear vision for the development of the subject and she works very effectively through the heads of year. Citizenship is well planned through the daily personal and social development lessons, subjects, skills week and enrichment activities. Two extra sessions each term are allocated for in-depth study of specific topics. All these features contribute to a good cohesive programme. At present there is insufficient information to successfully monitor individual progress or to measure achievement. Citizenship was not a curriculum subject at the time of the last report.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 11 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. National results are not yet available for individual subjects in 2003.

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business studies	5	100.0	89.1	20.0	31.7	32.0	35.4
Chemistry	5	100.0	84.8	0.0	36.9	28.0	35.2
General studies	18	77.8	78.6	27.8	25.7	30.6	30.0

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	15	100.0	96.1	86.7	48.7	106.7	85.1
Biology	12	100.0	91.6	16.7	26.3	73.3	74.1
Business studies	26	100.0	96.4	34.6	57.1	80.8	76.5
Chemistry	12	100.0	94.0	50.0	45.9	91.7	81.1
Drama	7	100.0	98.1	28.6	41.5	82.9	82.9
Economics	9	100.0	96.2	33.3	45.8	80.0	83.1
English literature	18	100.0	98.3	33.3	36.5	78.9	80.1
French	8	100.0	96.2	50.0	46.1	87.5	83.0
Design and technology	9	100.0	95.3	11.1	35.5	64.4	76.5
General studies	97	90.7	90.1	29.9	29.1	67.6	69.3
Geography	25	100.0	97.1	32.0	40.5	82.4	80.9
History	18	100.0	97.1	27.8	41.0	76.7	81.2
Mathematics	14	100.0	93.3	42.9	52.2	87.1	84.7
Music	7	100.0	97.7	14.3	41.8	71.4	82.2
Other social studies	16	100.0	94.3	31.3	38.9	80.0	77.7
Physics	9	100.0	92.8	55.6	42.8	86.7	78.6
Sociology	9	100.0	95.4	33.3	39.6	84.4	79.1
Sports studies	5	100.0	95.4	33.3	29.5	68.9	73.2

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

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus for this report was on English and French, although German was sampled. The teaching was very good in the German lesson and their work shows that students are doing better than expected.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good, so students achieve well.
- Students have not developed, nor been required by teachers to develop, independent learning skills to the extent that might be expected.
- The number of English-related subjects available to students has greatly increased since the previous inspection.

Examination results

145. In 2002, results at A level were above average, as they have been in most previous years.

Standards and achievement

146. In Years 12 and 13, students are generally willing to take part in group or whole-class discussion in order to increase their own understanding and to improve their communication skills. Even so, there is some variation in students' skills. Higher attainers are able to explain finer shades of meaning in works by Shakespeare and Keats, whilst lower attainers tend to express themselves in too colloquial a way and find difficulty in elaborating their ideas when invited to do so. Students are able to discuss some aspects of what they have read using appropriate technical terms, for example, regarding characterisation and dramatic effects. However, they have more limited skills and knowledge when discussing other features, such as poetical form and metrical structure. These characteristics are also mirrored in students' written work. Higher attainers produce well-expressed, rigorous, evaluative essays. The written work of lower attainers tends to be brief and the language lacks sophistication. The extent to which students develop their own reading interests is variable. At best, students have their favourite authors but a significant number of others have little interest in wider reading or cite general interest magazines as their preferred reading. Higher attaining students conduct their own research but many middle and lower attaining students depend heavily upon teachers to produce additional reading and to generate ideas.

Teaching and learning

147. Teachers possess good knowledge of the subject and of the requirements of the course. They therefore ensure that students understand what is required of them and this creates a good

sense of purpose in lessons. Teachers also make lessons as lively as possible. Good opportunities are created for students to be active, through such activities as group discussions, 'hot seating' and acting. This helps students to enjoy the work and to appreciate its relevance to their own lives. The pace of lessons varies. At best, the pace is vigorous and students achieve well because they are challenged. When the pace is too slow, students become too involved in relatively insignificant issues and so do not extend their understanding. Teachers set fewer tasks to require students to find out things for themselves than might be expected. The marking is mostly of high quality and explains to students what they need to do to improve. The intranet is a very valuable resource, but is not used as fully as might be expected.

Leadership and management

148. High standards in English literature have been maintained since the last inspection. Additionally, the department has proved to be very responsive to the needs and expectations of students with the result that new subjects, including English language, media studies, film studies and theatre studies, have been introduced.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

149. Standards of literacy are above average and students are well equipped to meet the demands of their subjects.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

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

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have taken the weaknesses identified in the speaking examination for the previous year very seriously and students are now performing well in this area.
- Students are achieving well because they are given demanding tasks and regularly work with authentic materials.
- Students do not always organise their work well and sometimes have difficulty revising or using information that they have been given.

Examination results

150. Results in the 2002 A level examinations were above average. Results fell in 2003; the weakness was in the speaking element of the examination.

Standards and achievement

151. Standards on the current AS course are above average and students are making good progress given what would be expected from their results in the GCSE. In the A level course, standards in the current year are above average and achievement is also good. Teachers have taken the weaknesses identified in the speaking examination for the previous year very seriously and have adapted their course and their teaching techniques very well, and students are now performing well in this area. By the end of Year 12, students are achieving well

because they are given demanding tasks and regularly work with authentic materials, including satellite broadcasts of French television programmes. They get several opportunities outside lessons to improve their spoken French by working with the foreign language assistant and by visiting France. In Year 13 the students increase the range of topics they feel confident about discussing. Topics such as immigration and pollution, their arguments develop during the course and their accuracy improves. They work with increasing accuracy when writing and their arguments become complex and persuasive.

Teaching and learning

152. Teachers have carefully adapted the course to take account of the students' weaknesses in speaking. This means that students now have to use French for everything they need to say, from asking for a pencil onwards. Teachers conduct lessons almost entirely in French so students develop improved listening skills and learn some accurate pronunciation. Students are mostly well challenged; for example, they are given some complicated passages to listen to on tapes. Students complete homework diligently and work hard at home to research topics in more depth so that they come to lessons well prepared. In some lessons students are very aware of what they need to do to improve; they get very good advice on both written and oral work and are set some challenging targets. In other lessons the quality of the feedback is not as good and a few mistakes go unchecked. The pace of lessons is generally good, resources are well chosen to be topical and interesting and ICT is used effectively to give students access to authentic and recent articles so that they can refine their arguments and language skills. Students do not always organise their work well enough and sometimes have difficulty revising or using information that they have been given.

Leadership and management

153. Progress since the last inspection has been good, the course has been adapted to take account of the types of students entering and examination results are very carefully analysed so that any weaknesses are quickly remedied. The course content is kept under regular review to make sure it meets the requirements of the examination board and to keep up to date with events in France.

MATHEMATICS

The focus was on mathematics, but accountancy was also sampled. Achievement is excellent in accountancy, and the reasons are clear in the outstanding teaching that students receive.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good level of teachers' knowledge leads to clear explanations of concepts.
- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- ICT is used well in lessons by students to consolidate and develop their learning.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed for students to develop their independent study skills by not encouraging them to prepare topics in advance of the lesson.

Examination results

154. In 2002, the results at A level were above average. In 2003, the results were lower.

Standards and achievement

155. Students have a good understanding of mathematics and make effective use of previous work when introduced to a new topic. In Year 12 at AS-level, students can use spreadsheets to investigate the trapezium rule as an alternative method of integration to estimate the values of a definite integral. In Year 13, students can calculate the product moment correlation coefficient with ease and check their values, again using a spreadsheet package.

Teaching and learning

156. Teachers have a very good knowledge of mathematics. Consequently students benefit from good support and clear explanations. This allows the students to improve their understanding and achieve well. Students often respond well to questions, can volunteer suggestions articulately and freely participate in discussions. The lessons proceed at a brisk pace and are planned well allowing students to build on each stage of new learning before progressing to the next. Homework is set regularly to effectively consolidate and extend new work introduced in the lesson. However, opportunities are missed for students to develop their independent study skills, by not encouraging them to research/prepare for topics in advance of their lessons. ICT is used well in lessons by students to consolidate and develop their learning. The notes and calculations made in class by some students lack structure and do not always lend themselves to future revision and learning. The marking of students' work contains good diagnostic comments that show the students where they have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

157. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Teachers work well together. They give students good support by providing tuition at lunchtimes when required. The schemes of work lack guidance on the appropriate teaching methods and resources, such as ICT, that would further enhance teaching. There are very good procedures for assessing students' performance as they progress through Years 12 and 13. However, students find the transition between GCSE and AS-level difficult to make. Teaching and learning styles are different and as a consequence learning suffers in the initial months. The development of additional mathematics in Year 11 has gone some way to alleviate this problem.

Mathematics across the curriculum

158. Good use is made of mathematics across the curriculum, the standards of which are well above average.

SCIENCE

The focus for this report was on chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. Teaching in the biology lesson was very good and students are clearly achieving well. In physics, the teaching, although satisfactory, is not as exciting as the other sciences and students do as well as expected.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are very knowledgeable and plan lessons carefully to include a good variety of interesting and challenging activities.
- Students enjoy the subject and work hard; they value the quality of teaching they receive.
- Students have few opportunities to use sensors and data-logging equipment or computer simulations.

Examination results

159. A-level results in 2002 were well above the national average, but were lower in 2003.

Standards and achievement

160. Students in Year 13 show skills in drawing and naming isomers of organic compounds that are better than expected for students following this course. They know the range of organic tests and can work out a method for identifying which alcohols are present in three samples. Students in Year 12 have very good skills in constructing presentations using ICT. For example, they used very good graphics in their imaginative and informative presentations on the gases that cause air pollution. However, several students found it more difficult to provide an appropriate commentary for their presentation. Students in both year groups generally have well-organised notebooks containing detailed notes of good quality. However, a few students do not present calculations as carefully as they should. Students have good investigative skills which generally match the standards in other aspects of their work.
161. In 2002, students achieved well in A-level chemistry. However, in 2003, students' achievement was only satisfactory. For part of their course, these students had been taught by a temporary teacher. Now that the regular staffing in the department has been restored, together with a limited teaching input from a new teacher, students are again achieving well and gaining standards that are better than might be expected from their GCSE results when they entered the AS course.

Teaching and learning

162. Teachers are very knowledgeable and use their understanding to plan lessons carefully. Unusually, the detailed planning is accessible to students on the school's intranet – a great benefit in terms of security for students but also an indication of teachers' confidence in their planning. Teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies. Students' files show useful 'interactive' notes and interesting 'factsheets' gained from websites and other sources. Teachers also provide plenty of practice with examination questions. Hence students do need to think and work hard, both during their lessons and in their own study time; they are certainly not allowed to be passive receivers of information.

163. Teachers make very good use of ICT in presenting their lessons and students use computers regularly to obtain and present information. However, students have relatively few opportunities to use sensors and data-logging equipment or computer simulations and this is an acknowledged area for development in the department.

Leadership and management

164. The head of subject provides a very good role model for the department, both in terms of his own teaching skills and his considerable experience of A and AS-level chemistry, notably in his work as an examiner. The three teachers, and the technician, work well together as a team, with the more experienced teachers providing very good support and resources for their less experienced colleague.

165. The department is very aware of its strengths and weaknesses and appropriate action is taken to tackle any shortcomings. The department was disappointed by the 2003 AS-level examination results. Teachers consulted students about where things could be improved, particularly in the large teaching groups that now exist in Year 12. They then made changes to ensure that students' achievement would be better in the future. Assessment procedures and the tracking of students' progress were improved so that a closer watch could be kept on students' progress. The January testing of the first module was abandoned to give more teaching time and longer for students to adjust to the level of work required. The arrangements for practical work were also adjusted. These changes are already proving their worth with the current Year 12.

166. A-level results were well above average in 2002, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Hence standards have generally been maintained since that time. Together with the recent improvements in the department's practice, this indicates that there has been good progress in chemistry since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus for the inspection was information and communication technology.

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

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

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Progress since previous inspection	Excellent

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn and achieve very well because of very good teaching.
- Excellent leadership has resulted in a unique system whereby all students have fantastic opportunities to make use of ICT.
- Some lessons do not involve students in their own learning enough.

Examination results

167. Results in the 2002 A-level examinations were below average although students achieved well. Results improved significantly in 2003. The vast majority of students also follow the key skills

course in information technology; the success rate is high with over 95 per cent of students gaining a pass at Level 3.

Standards and achievement

168. By the end of Year 12, students have an above average grasp of how generic software can be used to support their studies. They know and understand the difference between different types of media storage and are competent at using a wide range of applications. By the end of Year 13, students' practical skills are well above average and they achieve very well. They confidently use a range of software applications to solve problems, and draft and re-draft essays. They build upon existing spreadsheet skills, by beginning to use more advanced ones, in work that is preparing them to meet specific examination requirements. Students' achievement is exemplified by their work on real problems, such as the design of a website for the school.

Teaching and learning

169. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject, which they pass on well to students. All students achieve very well because teachers match the work effectively to the needs of every student. Very good relationships lead to a positive atmosphere for learning. Excellent software and hardware, including modern equipment for teaching, aids effective learning because it allows more efficient and effective ways of presenting information. Students respond exceedingly well to opportunities to discuss, or to answer questions, sometimes asking searching ones of their own. Assessment is rigorous, with accurate feedback on progress that informs students' next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

170. Leadership has clarity of vision and has succeeded in attracting and retaining an increasing number of students to the courses. A very good feature of the management is that it employs the sixth form students to supervise and manage ICT clubs. The staff team work very well together and are supported very effectively by the technical support team. Excellent progress has been made since the previous inspection. Standards are much improved because of the significant improvement in teaching.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

171. Many subjects build the use of ICT into their work, so students get lots of opportunities to use computers in a wide range of situations. Students apply and use computers confidently to support their learning. Throughout the inspection, many students were observed using the ICT facilities both in and outside normal school hours, especially for research in other subjects. Subject teachers are becoming confident users of ICT and as a result students' competence is well above average and they use computers far more than at the time of the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

The inspection focused on religious education, but geography, history, and sociology were sampled. Teaching is good in each of these last three subjects and students are doing well.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Conferences enable students to benefit from a range of high level sources.
- Teachers use simple explanations to support the understanding of difficult concepts.
- Group work enables students to learn from each other and consolidate their understanding through their own explanations.

Examination results

172. There were too few candidates to compare results with national figures in 2002, but results are usually above average.

Standards and achievement

173. Students have a secure understanding of the modules studied. They explain Kant's theory of ethics and recognise the arguments for and against its use. They apply it to contemporary moral issues such as abortion, and higher attaining students clearly understand the ethical arguments they are applying. Students write clearly and fluently, and use quotations and examples to support their explanations. In most written work, however, there is limited evidence of independent explanation of the merits of the different arguments. Students display a good grasp of the Buddhist concept of Nirvana as a freedom of the mind; however, their understanding of the concept of the Christian heaven and hell is generally simplistic, and makes little exploration into philosophical ideas of oneness or separation from God. Attendance at conferences enables students to benefit from a range of high level sources in the company of other sixth form students.

Teaching and learning

174. In the best lessons difficult theories are explained clearly, and simple activities are devised that reinforce students' understanding of them. Students are encouraged to explain their interpretations to each other, providing very good opportunities for them to consolidate their understanding. The depth of their understanding is not apparent, however, unless it is the topic of an essay, as the quality of students' day-to-day work is not checked. Students are willing to question and challenge because relationships between teachers and students are good, and students support each other's work. Teachers provide very good support for extended writing, and assessment identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Students are encouraged to set their own targets and this motivates them to reflect on their work.

Leadership and management

175. The good leadership and management of the department have led to the successful introduction of the A-level course. Resources have been developed and the use of the school religious education website enables students to access material for private study. All teachers

are involved in teaching the sixth form and this enables students to access a range of styles and expertise. All students in the sixth form have the opportunity to develop their understanding of religious questions through the short module included in the general studies course. This is supplemented by occasional additional events. Despite the limited time allocation, the quality of this module is high and students benefit from it.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

Overall the provision in design and technology is **good**.

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

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good; lessons are well structured and teachers possess a good knowledge of the subject.
- Students have very positive attitudes and commitment.
- Students have well-developed independent learning skills.

Examination results

176. Results at A-level in 2002 were below average; however, this represents good achievement given students' standards on entry to the course. Results in 2003 were better than those in 2002.

Standards and achievement

177. The standards of students currently in Year 13 are average but they are achieving very well given their standards on starting the course. Many students studying the subject start with much lower standards than is usually the case. Students have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of materials and processes and use product analysis and effective research techniques to support their designing and making. Students' work is thorough and well presented. In Year 12 standards are below average; however, students are achieving well. Students' knowledge of materials and processes is good and the most able students are able to draw upon this knowledge in order to analyse existing products thoroughly. Students use a variety of presentation styles in their work and ideas are clearly annotated against specified criteria. The use by some students of Computer Aided Design and Manufacture for producing computerised models of their designs is very good and leads to improved standards. Practical skills are generally not as good as other skills in both years.

Teaching and learning

178. Lessons are characterised by effective planning, and a clear focus on the development of technical understanding. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and are able to respond to students' questions in great depth, drawing upon a wide range of examples to support learning. By Year 13 students have developed good independent learning skills; this contributes to their very good level of achievement. The quality of teacher-led discussions is good; they are characteristically focused and highly relevant. Students are supported well,

especially those with special educational needs. Teachers use assessment and monitoring procedures well. Work is marked against examination board criteria and targets are set for individuals; this is good practice and leads to good achievement.

Leadership and management

179. The leadership and management of design and technology are good and as a result the department has made good progress since the last inspection. The new A-level in product design has been successfully introduced. CAD/CAM and ICT are now well used by students and the continued good achievement of the students reflects the consistently good management of teaching and learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focused on music.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn very well because of the very good teaching.
- Very good management has resulted in very good progress since the previous inspection.
- The variety of courses offered has resulted in increased take-up for the subject.
- The computers used by the music technology students are not up to the job and prevent students from gaining the highest grades.

Examination results

180. Results in 2002 were average. They have improved since the last inspection and improved further in 2003.

Standards and achievement

181. Students have well-developed musical skills. Those on the music course achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching. Those following the music technology course demonstrate a good understanding of sequencing software and recording techniques. However, these students are not able to use powerful enough computers so the music software they should be using does not work properly, thus preventing them from achieving as well as the teaching would merit. This lack of modern resources is unusual in a department with such highly competent music technology teachers. Year 13 students studying the music course have a good understanding of harmony and compositional techniques. Technical vocabulary is used well, and melodic and harmonic analysis is particularly strong.

Teaching and learning

182. Teaching is characterised by excellent planning. Lively direct teaching, including short, focused tasks, makes lessons proceed at a very rapid pace. Although the teaching is very good,

students on the music technology course only achieve well rather than very well because of the poor equipment they are provided with. Teachers prepare very high quality presentations that allow students to interact easily. The use of presentation software to demonstrate musical points and enhance interactive learning is a real strength of the teaching. Students are able to quickly identify musical concepts and can instantly play back their work because of the teachers' expert knowledge and use of ICT. Students have excellent attitudes to learning and have been taught to be very good independent learners. Because lessons are exciting and interesting the subject is growing in popularity and the recording studio is used at all times of the day.

Leadership and management

183. The head of department manages the department very well; he provides very good leadership with clear vision and direction. Planning and departmental documentation are excellent and useful information is stored on the interactive website so that students can work independently to a high level, using high quality resources that they value greatly. The computers within the department are old and slow and struggle to cope with the demands of the memory-hungry software needed to cover the requirements of the music technology course, so students' achievement is not as good as the teaching would usually merit. This weakness is, however, soon to be addressed. Standards have risen, teaching has improved and the numbers studying music have significantly increased since the last inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The inspection focused on physical education, but a leisure and recreation lesson was also sampled where the teaching and learning were good.

Physical education

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

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Students gain outstanding success at the Gold level of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Examination results

184. Results in the 2002 A-level examinations were below average, but there was an improvement in 2003.

Standards and achievement

185. Year 12 students are achieving well. They demonstrate an impressive mastery of ICT in researching information, and in the presentation of their personal performance portfolios. In Year 13, standards are average. Nevertheless, this is good achievement in relation to students'

starting points on entering the sixth form. Students are confident in using the specialist language of the subject, and can relate theory to their practical experience, effectively.

Teaching and learning

186. Good teaching reflects very good specialist knowledge of the subject and the examination syllabus. A range of teaching methods is used, effectively, to involve students in reflection, decision making and discussing their work. Teachers' probing questioning initiates stimulating discussion. Students' attitudes are very good. They contribute readily, work hard and support extra-curricular activities very well. Creative use of ICT adds a further dimension to students' learning, such as video editing to analyse individual practical performance. Very clear, informative marking ensures that students know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

187. Strong leadership and management ensure that raising standards is central to departmental planning. Assessment data is used, effectively, to predict grades and set individual targets. Students consider that the quality of support and guidance they receive is very good. There are extensive extra-curricular opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop leadership skills through the Community Sports Leader Award and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Sixth formers also help to run the inter-house sporting competitions, and assist teaching younger students. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. A-level has been introduced, and students are achieving well as a result of good teaching.

BUSINESS

Business studies

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

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

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching produces challenging lessons that move at pace and lead to very good achievement.
- Students work very well independently and relish the frequent opportunities to bounce their ideas off their teacher and each other in class discussions.
- Students' GCSE examination results are analysed well and appropriately challenging targets are set for students' A-level achievements.

Examination results

188. Results in the 2002 examinations were above average. Results were significantly higher in 2003, reflecting a rising trend in excess of the national improvement.

Standards and achievement

189. A significantly higher number of students than is common choose business education in Year 12, and they quickly adjust to the greater demands of AS-level work. The great majority produce writing that analyses critically source evidence, evaluates different views and reaches well-supported conclusions. Their analytical and discursive skills result in students performing very well in the AS-level examination.
190. All students continue the subject to A-level and, at the end of Year 13, they demonstrate well above average investigative skills, and become confident independent learners who express themselves very well in writing. At its best such work is exemplified by detailed and thorough coursework that includes clear evidence of relevant research as the basis of conclusions, for case study companies, about the economies and diseconomies of scale. Students achieve well above average A-level results and are very well prepared for the university courses that many of them go on to study.

Teaching and learning

191. Students benefit from very knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching. Teachers plan their lessons very well, often including in them a range of individual and interactive tasks that challenge and stimulate their students. As a result students both learn and achieve very well. Teachers' assessment of written assignments is accurate and the marking is detailed and thorough. The monitoring of students' achievement and progress is thorough and effectively informs students about how to improve. Students' attitudes towards the subject are very positive and an atmosphere of enjoyment pervades the lessons.

Leadership and management

192. The subject is led and managed very well and clear vision and direction are provided. A well-structured handbook that contains thorough schemes of work and guidance for staff is in place. An annual evaluation of students' performance in examinations is carried out and this feeds directly into teaching and learning plans. Standards have improved significantly since the previous inspection and this represents very good progress.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

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

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

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have steadily improved over recent years as a result of good leadership.
- Teachers are sensitive to students' individual needs and match activities appropriately.
- There are insufficient placements to increase students' experience of the whole range of health and social care services.

Examination results

193. Results in the three-unit, six-unit, and 12-unit AVCE awards have followed an improving trend. Students are exceeding their target grades and the department is producing results that are above the national average.

Standards and achievement

194. Value added indicators show that students achieve well compared with their prior attainment. Year 12 students demonstrate a competent understanding of health and social care services. They have a good understanding of the ethical issues that arise when balancing the rights of clients with the rights of others. Students in Year 13 can use and explain health measurements, interpret data and draw conclusions about the physiological status of clients well. They apply their knowledge well to practical situations.

Teaching and learning

195. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a genuine enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers prepare their work thoroughly. Teaching methods are imaginative and lead to a high level of interest from the students. The range of methods used is varied and students are therefore able to develop different ways of working; students' individual needs are catered for well. Students value the individual approach that teachers adopt; they are expected to work hard, but the level of challenge is realistic and students are appropriately productive. Teachers make effective comments on students' written work so that they know how well they are doing and how they can further improve their work. Detailed assessment plans are provided and the student-friendly assessment records thoroughly support coursework.

Leadership and management

196. The head of the department is committed to improvement. She has a sense of purpose and high aspirations for the subject. She is committed to inclusion and has an appropriate concern for the needs of individual students. It is not possible to judge progress since the time of the previous inspection, as health and social care was not reported on in that inspection.

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).