

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BRIDGNORTH ENDOWED SCHOOL**

Bridgnorth

LEA area: Shropshire

Unique reference number: 123586

Headteacher: Mrs P Chapman

Lead inspector: W K Baxendale

Dates of inspection: 29<sup>th</sup> September - 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2003

Inspection number: 259273

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

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### **Terms used in this report**

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils 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. Pupils 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 pupils and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, pupils 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 pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils 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 pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' **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 comprehensives with pupils who have about the same prior attainment.*

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive  
School category: Voluntary Controlled  
Age range of pupils: 11-19  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 1063

School address: Northgate  
Bridgnorth  
Shropshire  
Postcode: WV16 4ER

Telephone number: 01746 762103  
Fax number: 01746 768340

Appropriate authority: Governing Body  
Name of chair of governors: Mr Gordon Grant

Date of previous inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> November 1997

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bridgnorth Endowed School is an average sized secondary specialist technology college with 1063 pupils of whom 164 are in the sixth form. Its specialist status encourages the school to collaborate with other schools and communities in outlying villages to improve their access to ICT (information and communication technology) especially. The pupils are nearly all from a white British background. Four are at an early stage of learning English. The school is oversubscribed. Overall, the pupils are from slightly better than average socio-economic circumstances and their attainment on entry is average. There are fewer than average pupils with special educational needs, but an above average proportion has a statement of special educational need, as the school houses a 33-place specialist unit for pupils with learning and behaviour difficulties. The entitlement to a free school meal is below average. Pupil mobility is low. The school has an award for positive discrimination towards disabled people. It is closely involved in a Pathfinder project with the LEA (local education authority) and it is bidding for federation status to share parts of its curriculum with neighbouring schools. Provision is increased by the shared usage of a community leisure facility.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2928	W K Baxendale	Lead inspector	
19743	A Taylor	Lay inspector	
3943	D Innes	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
13046	M Marks	Team inspector	Mathematics
27050	V Blackburn	Team inspector	Science
30901	S Schofield	Team inspector	Art
10209	V Gormally	Team inspector	Design and technology
20119	A Bell	Team inspector	Information and communication technology; Special educational needs
17404	J Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History, Citizenship
30978	E White	Team inspector	Geography
30072	J Skivington	Team inspector	Music, Religious education
2628	J Edwards	Team inspector	Physical education
18888	J Boulton	Team inspector	Health and social care

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good school:** Pupils achieve very well and reach above average standards from only average standards when they start as 11 year-olds. Teaching and learning are good and the school has very good systems for helping the pupils to do well. Pupils' very good attitudes to learning contribute greatly to their very good achievement. Very good leadership provides a strong impetus that has, over the past four years raised standards, improved provision a lot and created a culture of success in the school. The technology college initiative makes an excellent contribution to improving learning and raising standards in school and, particularly, in the local communities. Matching cost against the standards and the very good quality of education, the school provides good value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils and students achieve very well and reach well above average standards.
- Very good leadership is forward thinking, enterprising and willing to take risks; there's a very clear sense of purpose.
- The school's very strong culture of success is based very firmly on teamwork. Its technology college status has a very big impact on much of its work.
- A very good guidance system combines with good teaching and learning to raise standards.
- Leadership and management in modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory.
- Occasionally, classwork does not extend all the pupils enough and the correction of some written work could be clearer on how to improve.
- Some individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs lack precision.

**Improvements since the previous inspection are good.** Each issue in the previous inspection has been attended to, but leadership weaknesses remain in modern foreign languages. The school is well on target to meet its demanding target to raise higher grade GCSE passes to above 70 per cent. Improvements in A-level results are excellent. The school's climate for learning is also very good and although boys do not do as well as girls, they did very much better in the 2003 GCSE examinations than they did previous years. The school has a very clear plan to improve and its mechanisms for putting the plan into action are foolproof. The successes brought by the award of technology college status have placed it very firmly in the heart of its community, where improved collaboration between institutions is a further indicator of improved effectiveness.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

**Standards are well above average.** Pupils' achievements are very good. Compared with all schools, Year 7 pupils' standards on entry are just average; Year 11 leavers' standards are well above average. The value added (*see full report, page 2*) is good. Reading and writing, mathematics and ICT capabilities improve rapidly. Pupils with special educational needs come on very well, too. Point scores in national tests for 14 year-olds and for GCSE are well above average. The highest GCSE passes are very unevenly spread between boys and girls. Well above national average point scores in A-levels are the county best.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	B	A	B
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	N/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 pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

The pupils' personal qualities are very good; they contribute very substantially to the standards they reach. They are polite, diligent and most are very hard working. There are occasional

currents of low-level disruption that are, in the main, coped with well. Exclusions are low and attendance and punctuality very good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils grasp chances to expand their learning and culture keenly and contribute very well to the friendly atmosphere that pervades the school. Pupils with physical disabilities are well integrated and the way sixth formers run the house system is indicative of how well the school places responsibilities on its pupils.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good.** Good teaching and learning in class is helped greatly by the way the very good pastoral system keeps a close eye on how well each child is doing, giving them helpful guidance on how to meet the targets they have to beat; this raises achievement to very good. Assessment is very good. The school's first-rate retrieval and use of data to keep up challenges on pupils and departments, add greatly to the quality of education as everyone is able to pull in the same direction. The very good on-the-job training teachers receive is clearly seen in the better quality of teaching Years 7 to 9 now enjoy. The good curriculum provision meets the needs of pupils well and plans to improve it further are well advanced. The school's associations with the community are excellent.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership is very good. Management is good. Governance is very good.** These three factors underpin the pupils' very good achievement and rising standards. The headteacher's excellent leadership has, in the four years since appointment, given the school a big push forward by winning specialist technology school status, setting demanding targets and providing the management structures that make sure everyone knows what to do to improve. The methods used to plan and to check on how successfully plans are put into practice are watertight. The school pulls together as a unit and the governing body, which holds it closely to account, supports leaders very well. There is some room for improvement in the ways subject leaders account for their work, in modern foreign languages particularly. Very effective steps to eliminate complacency mean that standards are rising and they appear on course to continue to do so.

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

Parents prize the school and flock to it in greater numbers than its capacity will take. The partnership between home and school is very strong and parents claim to be proud to have the school in their community. Links with the community are very good and the work to expand the school's specialist status has created some excellent community links. Whilst not over the moon about the uniform, pupils acknowledge the school does well by them.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Improve leadership and management in modern foreign languages.
- Make sure that lessons are organised to cater well for all the pupils in any class.
- Check more carefully and regularly to see that corrected written work contributes as fully as possible to raising standards.
- Make sure all individual education plans are precise enough to measure achievement.

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- Make suitable arrangements to allow all pupils to have the equivalent of a daily act of collective worship.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

This is a broadly average sized sixth form of 164 students. Numbers joining the sixth form are increasing, with some from non-English speaking backgrounds to perfect their command of

English. Students enter the sixth form with GCSE results that are just above average. They select from AS and academic or vocational A-level courses or a GNVQ course in Health and Social Care.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Provision in the sixth form is very good.** The sixth form is cost effective and provides good value for money. Standards are well above average and improving; students achieve very well. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The broad range of courses offered meets the needs of the students effectively. The sixth form is very well managed and organised.

#### The main strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form are:

- Standards are well above average and improving, and very high in English.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and students achieve very well.
- Monitoring and evaluation of students' progress and achievement are very good.
- Students' attitudes are very positive.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- Standards in French are too low and students do not achieve as well as they should.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements 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	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are well above average as a result of very good teaching and learning. Leadership and management are very good.
English	Very good. Very good teaching and the positive attitudes of students produce very high standards. Leadership and management of the department are very good.
Biology	Good. Teaching and learning are good and lead to above average standards. Leadership and management are good.
Art	Very good. Standards are above average. The very good teaching results in very good achievement by students. Leadership and management are very good.
Design	Good. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good. Leadership and management are very good.
Geography	Very good. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Leadership and management are very good.
French	Unsatisfactory. Standards are below average and students do not achieve as well as they should. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.
Religious Studies	Good. Standards are average but improving and students now achieve well as a result of very good teaching. Leadership and management are very good.
Physical Education	Good. Students achieve well. Standards are well above average and results are improving because of good teaching. Leadership and management are very good.

Lessons in psychology, physics, chemistry, English language, drama, health and social care and ICT were also sampled. Standards in psychology, English language and ICT were average. In



health and social care, drama, physics and chemistry they were above average. The quality of teaching and learning was good. In physics and chemistry they were very good.

### **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

**Very good.** The school keeps a close check on students' progress in relation to their target grades and students regularly evaluate and plan their own progress with their tutors and subject teachers. Students are carefully monitored at the beginning of their courses to ensure they have made appropriate choices and they are achieving as they should.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

**Very good.** Quality assurance through monitoring, evaluation and improvement is effective in ensuring students achieve very well. There is a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses and staff work well together as a team. Courses meet the needs of the students and are staffed by teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience. The school works effectively with partner institutions to provide an appropriate range of courses and guidance.

### **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Students have good relationships with their teachers and appreciate the help they receive, especially on how to improve. Students appreciate the guidance they receive in relation to higher education courses. Students overall consider that their progress has been hindered by the long-term absence of some specialist teachers. Some students would also appreciate more advice on courses they should follow in the sixth form.

Inspectors agree with what students like about the sixth form and that their progress has been hindered by long-term absence of some specialist staff. In discussion with students during the inspection they refuted strongly negative views expressed in the questionnaire and they were positive about careers and course advice.

### **COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

*Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, 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".*

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

**Standards are well above average. Achievements are very good in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form.**

Pupils starting as 11 year-olds have average standards. GCSE results of 16 year-olds are well above average. Pupils with special educational needs achieve just as well as the rest because of the good extra help they receive. Standards in lessons and in written work indicate achievements are also very good in Years 7 to 9, but a residue of staffing difficulties in some subjects has reduced achievement in Years 10 and 11 to good. The 16 year-olds' standards remain above average and are likely to continue to rise in future years. Standards in the sixth form are well above average.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils achieve very well and reach well above average standards.
- A-level results are well above average and the highest in the county.
- GCSE average point scores are well above average and rising.
- The pupils' use of key skills in language, mathematics and ICT are good, raising standards.
- Pupils with special educational needs do very well.
- Standards in modern foreign languages are not high enough.
- Some staffing problems have undermined standards in science, art, music and modern foreign languages and mathematics.

#### Commentary

1. Annually, the pupils who start as 11 year-olds have about average, or sometimes just above average standards. The national Key Stage 2 test results of those who started in 2003 showed them to have reached precisely average standards, no better, overall.
2. The pupils do very well; achievement in the first three years is very good because the pupils work hard, have very good attitudes to their work and are caught up in a very positive learning atmosphere. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 and take their national tests for 14 year-olds, results are well above average compared with all schools and above average compared with similar schools. Over the last four years, rises in standards are about the same as the national rate of improvement. Progress is just a bit better overall in mathematics than in English. Able mathematicians do very well indeed, with over half reaching at least one level above what is expected of 14 year-olds. However, pupils achieve best in science; where more pupils reach or exceed the national expectations.

#### *Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002*

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.3 (33.7)	33.3 (33)
mathematics	36.6 (36.9)	34.7 (34.4)
science	35.4 (35.7)	33.3 (33.1)

*There were 176 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

3. Standards in class confirm the patterns of improvement. However, as the current inspection took place very early in the school year, the standards of work seen had not yet reached the

well above average levels registered in national test and examination results. They were well on their way to doing so and should be above average throughout the school.

4. The school's very thorough analysis of results is used extensively to check on how departments and individual pupils and students are doing. The procedures that have been set up raise standards because everyone is more aware of what needs to be done to improve performance. Rising standards are the outcome of a partnership between pupils, teachers and parents, who appear better able to pull together than at the time of the previous inspection.
5. GCSE results are also well above average and are on a rising trend similar to the national pattern of improvement. They are above average compared with similar schools. The 2003 results were the best in the school's history. Although there are no national points of comparison they were a substantial improvement on the well above average 2002 results.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	61 (62)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	45.3 (N/A)	39.8 (N/A)

*There were 180 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year, if available.*

6. Girls do better than do boys, but both boys' and girls' achievement and the standards they reach are above those found nationally. Boys' results improved substantially in 2003. The very few pupils from an ethnic minority achieve in line with the rest. The school has met its targets, but is aiming to do even better.
7. The pupils' literacy standards improve; speaking, reading and writing are above average by the time they reach the end of Year 9. There are some inconsistencies in the way departments use technical terms related to their subject. The good use of mathematics in many subjects reinforces the pupils' mathematical standards well. As part of the school's specialist college status, both provision and the use made of ICT has improved a lot since the previous inspection; it now plays a very significant part in reinforcing learning and 14 year-olds' standards in ICT are well above average. Each of the key skills in the use of language, mathematics and ICT goes on improving among pupils in Years 10 and 11, who also achieve well so that they are well prepared for the GCSE examinations in which they do well
8. Pupils with special educational needs do very well, confirming the parents' faith in the school's provision for them. Because of the good provision for them, pupils with special educational needs are able to cope with the work set. They make some errors in spelling and grammar, but all are able to use a wide vocabulary and above average proportions can get under the surface of texts to suggest reasons 'why', but find it hard to organise longer pieces of writing. The success of the school's work to include everyone and to give them an equal chance is one of the best features of the examination results. In 2003, there was a big improvement in the numbers of pupils obtaining certificates; very few leave without recognised certification. Whilst a start has been made, there is room for extension of the work done to stretch the gifted and talented, who achieve very well nonetheless.
9. Owing to recent turbulence in staffing, pupils' achievements in Years 10 and 11, and students' achievements in sixth form biology, in science, mathematics, art, modern foreign

languages, music and religious education are lower than they should be, as some pupils failed to make the expected progress. However, some often very good teaching is producing very good learning and there are clear signs of pupils catching up.

- Examination results are about average in modern foreign languages, but over a grade lower than those obtained by pupils in the other subjects. Results are not good enough. The pupils' confidence in using language spontaneously is weaker than it should be; there is room for substantial improvement pre- and post-16.

### The sixth form.

- Improvements since the previous inspection are excellent. From about the national average, point scores in A-level examinations have rocketed to well above average and are now at a level that outstrips all other schools and colleges in the county, not least the one that takes a few of the school's higher attainers from it after GCSE. It is likely that the 2003 results will remain well above average. The main reasons for the improvements and for the well above average standards are consistency in expectations and practice. Good teaching and very close attention to students' progress by the very effective form tutor and mentoring systems mean they achieve very well.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.6 (93.2)	94.8 (N/A)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	42.5 (32.7)	39.4 (N/A)
Average point score per student	323.9 (20.1)	263.3 (17.4)

*There were 81 students in the year group. Point score calculations changed in 2002. Brackets show the previous year.*

- There are differences in students' performances in A-levels. In 2002, English literature results were in the top 5 per cent nationally but those in German were well below average. Nearly all others were above or well above average and none below average. Standards of work seen are well above average and they reflect the pattern of examination results very closely.

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

Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal qualities are **very good**. Attendance is **high**. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good work attitudes; a main reason why they do so well.
- Behaviour is very good and pupils are mature and responsible.
- Attendance is high; in the top ten per cent of schools in the country.
- The sixth formers play a very important part in setting the tone of the school.
- Exclusions from school because of poor behaviour are very low.
- Social and moral development is very good.
- There is sometimes very low level disturbance in lessons, from boys.

### Commentary

- Pupils are very highly motivated and eager to learn. This is an important reason why they achieve so very well. They attend school regularly, rarely miss a day and are punctual. Behaviour is very good. Exclusions are rare.

**Exclusions**

***Ethnic background of pupils***

***Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1007	27	0
White – Irish	1		
White – any other White background	14		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	2		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	5	2	
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Chinese	2		
Any other ethnic group	1		
No ethnic group recorded	12	1	

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

14. Nearly all pupils are friendly, polite, and mature individuals, who enjoy school and want to do well. They work hard, are conscientious and a pleasure to teach. However, the school's confidence in selecting purely at random pupils to talk with inspectors did produce a sample that demonstrated very clearly the fully comprehensive intake, from the very fluent to monosyllabic youngsters it is hard to please! Although not over the moon about the uniform, pupils acknowledge the school does well by them and a significant feature is that pupils' very positive attitudes greatly improve the progress they make. When given homework, they do their best, most often completing it to a high standard. This is because they are highly self-motivated. Most parents value the benefits of a good education for their children and ensure their children attend; this leads to very high attendance that, again, helps raise standards.

***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year, 2002/3 (%)***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.4%	School data	0.4%
National data	7.8%	National data	1.2%

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

15. One impressive aspect, showing what well-rounded pupils they are, is demonstrated by the considerable amounts, running into thousands of pounds, pupils raise for charity each year. Pupils behave very well, both in class and around the school. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the civilised atmosphere in the dining room, which was among the very best they had seen.

16. Occasionally, there is some very low-level disturbance from boys in lessons, mainly in Year 10, where they talk amongst themselves, start pen tapping or similar and are slow to settle. This often happens when work is not challenging enough. Sometimes it happens despite the teacher's best efforts. In conversation with inspectors about how the school deals with bullying, pupils were universally complimentary about procedures and felt bullying was not an issue. This contradicted the pupil questionnaire somewhat. Inspectors certainly support the view that bullying is handled well and is not widespread. Relationships are strong and supportive, based upon pupils who like their teachers and teachers who have a genuine interest in their pupils.
17. Satisfactory spiritual development is supported mainly through religious education, history, art and music. Personal, health and social education makes a good contribution raising issues of discrimination and racism. Individual pupils are highly valued by the school and achievement is recognised. A very positive pastoral system offers care and support to all pupils and a real sense of awe is generated well through numerous experiences pupils have in, among others, art and drama classes.
18. Social and moral development is very good. Pupils are aware of the school's code of conduct and very good relationships exist throughout the school. There is a very clear ethos for work. The school gives many opportunities for personal development and responsibility. During the inspection, pupils in Year 8 were observed electing school council representatives in a mock election at a polling station. Abortion issues were discussed in a Year 11 lesson, the legality of the law and the moral issues surrounding abortion; these were covered sensitively. Work in and with the community is excellent.
19. Very good practice occurs when sixth form students are elected Heads of House and are responsible for organising a range of activities throughout the school. The way they undertake these duties seriously and imaginatively produces a real spur to their maturity and personal development; sporting events, poetry competitions and drama events take place successfully. The sixth form committee is particularly successful.
20. Cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, support a wide range of extra-curricular activities very well. Regular visits to France and Germany extend the cultural dimension for pupils. Art, music and religious education consider a range of other cultures and religions, but opportunities for understanding diversity and interdependence of these cultures is underdeveloped in some subjects.

### **The sixth form**

21. Sixth form students have very good attitudes to their work. They have high aspirations, know where they are going and are determined to get there. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are very good role models for younger students. They play a key role in school life, motivating and organising younger pupils into taking part in sports events, fund-raising thousands for charity, leading assemblies and helping in class. Sixth formers are well represented on various committees, and their voice is sought after and listened to. They were not happy with wording on the issued student questionnaire and intend to make their views known officially.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is **very good**.

Pupils take the all-round opportunities they have to learn very well and their achievement is very good. Pupils use the very well run library fully, they do their homework and, most importantly, they benefit from watertight support structures that make sure subject and pastoral teachers, as well as managers, keep a very close eye on how they are doing. Any instances of slippage are picked up very quickly. Nearly all work and play very hard because of the good curriculum that suits their interests well. ICT is an everyday feature of learning that helps to raise standards. These features, combined with the good teaching and learning in lessons, provide the very good quality of education.

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good**. Assessment is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subjects and their pupils very well.
- The pupils' very good attitudes and desire to learn help them to achieve very well.
- From very good assessments, form tutors pay very close attention to how pupils and students are doing: this reinforces work done in lessons and contributes very well to the very good quality of education.
- Strong parental support in the completion of homework helps to raise standards.
- A programme of on-the-job training undergone by teachers is clearly paying off in improved teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9.
- Work is not tailored closely enough to different pupils' learning in some lessons.
- Some lessons still lack enough variety and stimulus and the 'wow' factor that indicates excellence is not there very often.
- The correction of some written work does not give clear enough indications on how to improve.

### Commentary

22. The following table lists inspectors' evaluations of teaching during the inspection. The quality of learning matched this very closely.

#### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 168 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (2%)	40 (24%)	78 (46%)	43 (26%)	3 (2%)	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.*

23. The school's concentration on improving teaching and learning quality in Years 7 to 9 is bearing fruit; uniform good practice has pupils being made clear about what they are going to learn at the start of each lesson. A thorough check at the end helps pupils to appreciate their achievement and gives teachers an indication of success or need for further work. In doing this, the very effective use of plastic whiteboards involves all pupils and is popular with them. A weakness is that teachers do not always make amendments to their teaching from the results of such assessments. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are also good.

24. A consistent strength is the teachers' very good command of the subjects they teach and their willingness to share this with the pupils and sixth form students. High expectations of what the pupils will be able to do typify much of the teaching in English, mathematics and science. In mathematics, many challenges are given to pupils, culminating in early entry for GCSE for those who are capable. ICT is used widely to help reinforce learning. Its absence from history is unfortunate; it appears not to affect standards adversely, yet it fails to tap stimulating learning sources.
25. Good variety of activity is a regular feature of most lessons, so pupils' interest is retained. The pupils' very good abilities to concentrate are used very well and generally the hard-won fertile atmosphere of the school lends itself to the good learning that is commonplace. Brisk pace follows from this and so teachers are able to give uninterrupted, clear explanations and can conduct discussions with individuals without having to appeal for calm.
26. The involvement of most parents in the completion of homework raises standards. A scrutiny of written work showed that homework is effective in reinforcing learning, although inequality can arise when not enough time is given to let those with no domestic access, for example to the Internet, arrange to use the school's facilities.
27. Teachers' planning is very good and the work interests the pupils, so motivating them to learn. In the best lessons, good use is made of classroom assistants and the work is well tailored to the different abilities in a class. This is not always so and sometimes the pre-planning of lessons fails to include the learning assistant, who is then less able to provide any required help.
28. Assessment is very good. A very good association between teaching staff and form tutors helps the pupils to learn well in and out of class. Procedures for assessing pupils' achievement are very good. Pupils' progress in class is recorded very carefully each term and is watched over by form tutors in one-to-one tutorials that help learning; parents are also involved. Because they are given this clear information on how they are doing and often what they should do to go one better, the pupils feel secure in their work and achieve very well as a result. Any pupils falling behind are picked up very quickly and effective measures to get them to catch up are put in place.
29. Stopping assessment being otherwise excellent, the correction of written work and the creation of work that stretches all the pupils during a lesson could be improved. There are some shining examples of very helpful correction that give very good indicators of what should be done to improve in most subjects, but in the same subjects, some correction is slipshod and some work appears not to have been corrected in a long time. The school gives middle managers time to check on the work of their departments, and senior leadership conducts checks too, but inspection evidence shows scope for even more frequent interventions. In a proportion of lessons, the work fails to stretch different pupils. Sometimes it is higher attainers who are missed, and at other times it can be the lower attainers who may wallow. On-the-job training has been dedicated to this work but there is room for continuing to give attention to it.
30. In a school in which results are going in the right direction and in which pupils' attitudes are so well disposed towards learning, teaching is a bit unadventurous. The school decided, on cost grounds, against advanced skill teachers. It is not shy in taking risks, yet the 'wow' element that often signals excellence was less frequent than anticipated in lessons, as a result, teaching missed the 'very' good judgement, but such an omission did not detract from the pupils' very good achievements.



## The sixth form

31. Both teaching and learning are **good**. Assessment is **very good**.
32. The positive comments in the paragraphs above apply equally to the sixth form. Reservations expressed above are not relevant; no unsatisfactory teaching took place and the support structures that let the students know how well they are doing are even better developed. Very high challenge, off-site study, visits to galleries, wide usage of alternative sources of information and insistence on thinking things out for themselves, are all part of the good learning and teaching found in the sixth form. Students' full participation in the life of the school and their outstandingly good attitudes to work and recreation all contribute to the well above average outcomes of sixth form study. Some French teaching is too conservative; it fails to challenge the students sufficiently.

## The curriculum

The quality of curriculum provision is **good**. Enrichment through extra-curricular activity is **good**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provides a good, broad range of learning opportunities for all pupils.
- Specialist status has brought very good extra dimensions to ICT and design and technology.
- There are very good opportunities for participation in sport, the arts and field studies.
- The very good match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is raising standards.
- There is no daily act of collective worship.
- Poor accommodation impedes pupils' progress in music.

### Commentary

33. The quality and range of learning opportunities provided by the school are good and are enhanced by a good, extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are met with the exception of a collective act of worship for every pupil each day. Since the previous inspection, Technology College status has enabled the school to strengthen the provision for ICT and for design and technology. Resources are used particularly well to develop better learning opportunities and to improve the school's collaboration with partner institutions. Governors are actively involved in planning the curriculum that aims to meet the needs of all pupils. The curriculum sub committee meets regularly and governor training ensures that governors are well informed.
34. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 provides a very sound foundation for further studies in National Curriculum subjects, also giving pupils the opportunity to study drama, and two languages from Year 8. Personal, social and health education is taught satisfactorily, but the scheme of work for the tutor period is not put to consistent good use.
35. The good and sensitive support given to pupils with special educational needs ensures that they can access every aspect of the curriculum. Pupils with physical disabilities are well integrated and have full access to the curriculum. The library, which has been enlarged and developed, is an effective and busy resource centre. In Year 9, pupils are given good advice as they choose their examination courses of study.
36. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is good. The school has identified gifted and talented pupils as a new focus. The proportion of A\* grades in GCSE is rising, especially in subjects that are direct beneficiaries of the technology college award, and interest in how to extend these pupils is growing. A new, very enthusiastic co-ordinator has been appointed and plans

are in place to meet their needs even more fully, for example, through collaboration between five partner schools. The pupils themselves can identify their own skills and know their strengths, but sometimes feel praise for their efforts is not forthcoming. They feel some pressure and are very grateful for suggestions on how better to organise their work. Where teachers plan to meet their needs, progress is often very good. However, in some lessons, work is not planned to extend these pupils and they are not challenged sufficiently, but the progress of most remains very good.

37. The wide range of academic option choices in Years 10 and 11 caters well for pupils' interests and aspirations. The compulsory core subjects include double science, ICT, design and technology and mathematics, reflecting the specialist technology college status with innovative developments in mathematics and design and technology. Good provision for vocational education attracts pupils who might find a full GCSE programme not fully suitable. Good numbers of boys and girls take the GNVQ Engineering and Health and Social Care courses. Aspects of personal social and health education are satisfactorily covered in religious education, science, focus days and morning tutor periods.
38. All pupils have specific ICT lessons. Extra ICT suites and an increased amount of hardware and software have resulted in a significant increase in the use of ICT to enhance the teaching and learning in most subjects; this is having a positive effect on the quality of education and is raising standards.
39. Good further opportunities enrich the curriculum. Sports are very well represented, as is drama. In art, visits to galleries and art workshops with visiting artists strongly support learning, and field trips in history and geography stimulate pupils' interest and promote very good learning. School Council elections give pupils a first hand taste of citizenship and pupils' active involvement in raising money for school charities broadens their awareness of the plight of others.
40. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The accommodation for design and technology and ICT is very good, although the latter lacks air conditioning. However, pupils work in cramped conditions in art. The accommodation in music is poor, hindering access to the full music curriculum.
41. There is, overall, a very good match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum. As a result, the teachers' expertise contributes very well to the good learning that occurs. However, in English too many classes have more than one teacher; this makes for 'bitty' learning.

### **The sixth form**

42. The quality of the curriculum in the sixth form is **good**.
43. Sixth Form courses build effectively on those in Years 10 and 11. Guidance for those entering Year 12 is good; almost all complete their courses. Academic, vocational and combination courses are offered and choices are further increased through participation in distance learning opportunities in accounting, law and sociology. The range of vocational courses is, however, limited and the school is conducting serious enquiries in collaboration with partner secondary schools into an extension of provision. The general studies course taken by all students ensures that statutory requirements for religious education are met and students' acquisition of key skills is encouraged by timetabled support. Although the time allocated to almost all subjects is appropriate, it is unsatisfactory in music and is lowering standards. In addition, where groups are large, as in history and religious studies, for example, the time teachers can give to individual students is reduced considerably.

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

The quality of care, welfare and health and safety is **good**. Support, advice and guidance for pupils are **very good**. The involvement of pupils in the work and development of the school is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good monitoring of pupils' progress is made by an effective support programme and form tutors closely checking pupils' academic progress.
- There is a caring environment, with very good support for the needs of the individual.
- Well-established arrangements for the move from primary to secondary help pupils feel quickly at home.
- The school is sincere in its desire to find out and act upon pupils' views.
- There are no weaknesses in this area of the schools' work.

### **Commentary**

44. This is a school in which individuals are recognised and cherished. Work to make sure all are fully included in school life is well advanced. Pupils are looked after well. Teachers, who do all they can to help pupils succeed, know their personal and individual learning needs very well. Health and safety issues are attended to carefully and overseen by senior staff. Measures to support individual pupils, especially when they are experiencing difficulties preventing them from learning, are carefully devised, with good support from a range of external agencies. Issues related to racism are dealt with very effectively through on-line communication with the LEA. There is always someone who cares and will listen for pupils to turn to. In conversation with inspectors, pupils were adamant that this is the case, contradicting the negative results to the Ofsted questionnaire. Inspectors agree that staff are kind and caring.
45. The way the school keeps a check on how pupils are progressing is also very good. This is largely because of the careful way teachers support their pupils, combined with regular checking from form tutors to find out how pupils are getting on with their work. Very good use of assessment data helps staff keep pupils on track and identifies potential problems. Such collaboration is a key feature that contributes greatly to the pupils' very good achievement.
46. Very good systems, as pupils move from primary to secondary school, enable each pupil to have a personal interview with a senior member of staff. This has proved especially useful to ensure worries are quickly allayed and to resolve any settling in problems when they first arrive. Here, pupils do settle quickly. An unplanned, yet welcome spin-off from their technology college work with primary schools, means pupils recognise, with pleasure, familiar faces of staff who work jointly in the primaries.
47. Consultation is viewed as important and the fact that pupils sit on many 'official' committees, such as health and safety, community monitoring group and attend governors' meetings, is testimony to this. Pupils' views are listened to and acted upon, finances permitting. There are several instances of improvements being made at pupils' request, for example, more vending machines and new tuck shops for all year groups. The school acknowledges pupils' quite justifiable complaint about the poor state of the toilets. Some improvements have been made, but lack of money is the limiting factor.

### **The sixth form**

48. The quality of support and guidance is very good. Students acknowledge this and speak with gratitude about the very good advice from and supportive relationships they have with teachers, which guide them in making choices. Whilst they are set demanding challenges to

perform well, there is very close monitoring of students' progress, a mainstay of their very good achievement. Regular time is set aside to discuss how, for example, coursework is going. The fact that hardly any students leave courses before completion is a testimony to the careful guidance they receive. The quality of careers advice and guidance is good and students have easy access to a range of specialist advice about different career paths.

## **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The partnerships with parents, other schools, colleges are **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The partnership between home and school is very strong.
- Very strong home/school links help pupils to achieve higher standards.
- The school enjoys very good parental support for learning and fundraising.
- The school's partnership with other schools in the area has improved substantially in the past few years and collaboration is bringing increasing benefits.
- There are no weaknesses in this aspect of the schools' work.

### **Commentary**

49. This is a popular and over-subscribed school, highly regarded by parents and the community. The school has rightly earned such respect through its outward-looking approach to community involvement, its willingness to be bold and innovative, its desire to work in partnership with other schools and its strong encouragement for parents to support their child.
50. The successes of the headteacher and staff in winning parental help to improve already high standards, are very good. There is a particularly strong example of good practice from the geography department, which gets parents to check regularly how their children are getting on with coursework; an information booklet requires parents to sign at intervals, to confirm work has been done. Such close monitoring from both home and school gives pupils little 'room for manoeuvre', ensuring coursework is completed on time and to a good standard. This is especially helpful for boys, who often find coursework more difficult to organise and manage.
51. Parents are well briefed by the school soon after their child starts their GCSE course. Attendance at the Year 10 parents' information evening is very good; it prepares parents for the reality of examination courses and allows them to be 'one step ahead of the game'. A presentation entitled 'The stresses and strains of the GCSE teenager' raises a few smiles, and makes sure parents know what to expect. As a result, they become more confident in keeping an eye on their child throughout the vital GCSE years. Parental support is high; to have provided the school with a brand new mini bus last year and donated to the Technology College bid, and is clear proof of their faith in the schools' work.
52. For links with the community, please refer to the paragraphs on Page 23.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is **very good**. Management is **good**. Governance is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's excellent leadership provides a very clear direction.
- Very high expectations mark senior leadership's ambition for the school and teamwork is very strong.
- The governing body makes a very good contribution by casting a very critical eye over the school's planning and development.
- The school's work is respected widely in the local area.
- Management and leadership in modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory; effective measures are in place to resolve this.
- The good performance of middle managers is helping to raise standards, but there is room for some improvement.
- Financial planning is very strong.

### Commentary

53. Governors do a very good job. Their close questioning of leadership's actions includes a very rigorous evaluation of the performance of the headteacher. Governors' decisions come out of in-depth debate on the implications of ideas senior leadership puts forward. Once approved, support is very strong; governors have played very full parts in the many exciting projects that have seen the school become a specialist college and a much more important player in the local community. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well.
54. The governors fulfil their statutory duties in all respects, except the provision of a daily act of collective worship, which is unsatisfactory, as no alternative provision has been set up to make up for the lack of a large enough room. Governors' expertise is drawn readily upon, for example in matters of finance. With foresight and careful planning, the school has stayed in the black through some very hard times since the previous inspection. The rising pupil roll is helping to keep the balance.
55. This school aims for equality in all it does. Attendance at governors' meetings is recorded carefully and any absence must be fully accounted for and approved in just the same way as pupils and students.
56. The headteacher's excellent leadership has, since her appointment four years ago, given the school a clear purpose and a real buzz. Collaboration with four other area schools to improve provision is well advanced. Rapidly risen standards, especially in the sixth form, have brought requests to tell others in the county how to do it. Very high expectations have moved the school a long way since it was found to be already good by the previous inspection. Sensitive to that fact, one of her major feats has been in leading others to prepare for and to win specialist college status.
57. The different strengths of the very good senior leadership staff complement each other very well. They operate very well as a team. Drive and purpose are admirably underpinned by meticulous attention to detail in, for example, analysing results. As a result, the putting together and running of the school's excellent development plan are strongly supported by careful thinking about how it will improve standards and if it can be afforded. Success is clear: over-subscription and a desire to do even better. People want to be part of the school's successes and to add to its reputation, not least as a school in which all pupils, especially those with special educational needs get a good deal and do well.

58. The quality of management is good. The headteacher and her senior colleagues carry out hard-edged checking of how the school is doing in all aspects of its work. From these checks arise the excellent school development planning and very well supported training programmes; both are very well focused on better teaching and learning quality.
59. Senior managers do a very good job in putting school policy into practice by working closely with middle managers; who, in turn, do a good job with their colleagues, but there are some gaps in performance. The oversight of the correction of books and the checking of teaching quality, despite having time allocated for the purpose, require further attention in some subjects. The sharing of good practice could be improved in English. Work still needs to be done in most subjects on setting work that stretches all pupils. The help given to non-specialists in the teaching of ICT is not enough to provide consistency. Management in modern foreign languages, although being handled well, remains unsatisfactory.
60. The whole school treats the recruitment of staff very seriously and support to new staff is very good. Teachers now have enough time for preparation and for management duties; inspection of professional development sessions showed serious commitment to doing better.
61. Barriers to learning have occurred. Problems of finding staff good enough to cover longer-term absences still undermine standards in sixth form science, mathematics, art, modern foreign languages and in music, where very unsuitable accommodation also makes things worse.
62. The operating systems of a highly efficient bursar and the close attention of interested governors who are very good with money, are put to very good use and guarantee financial probity. The budget balances, local audit finds nothing wrong and the school applies principles of good financial management very seriously. The sixth form is cost-effective; the money allocated for sixth formers is not quite all used for that purpose. Considering the high cost of educating each pupil overall against the very good quality of education and the well above average results, the school provides good value for money.

## Financial information

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,264,460	Balance from previous year	35,590
Total expenditure	3,282,690	Balance carried forward to the next year	17,360
Expenditure per pupil	3,091		

## Leadership and management in the sixth form

63. The untimely death of the head of sixth form in the week before the inspection makes it hard to evaluate the current situation precisely. A deputy head of sixth form had taken over a few weeks before and was doing a very good job of continuing provision. The legacy of shared leadership and management was very good. It had been responsible for making sure that the structures to support students' learning were in place and working. Results show this to have been highly effective.
64. Quality assurance remains effective in ensuring students continue to achieve very well. There is a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses and staff work well together as a team. Courses meet the needs of the students and are staffed by teachers with appropriate

qualifications and experience. The school works effectively with partner institutions to provide an appropriate range of courses and guidance.

## COMMUNITY PROVISION

Links with the community are **excellent**.

Community links are extensive. Technology College work in the community and with primary schools is excellent. This work, which contains much practice which inspectors judge to be outstanding, is evaluated below.

### Example of Outstanding Practice

Inspirational work is bringing a breath of life for rural communities. Free adult education computer courses in outlying villages and adult learning ICT courses in the school, have motivated villagers to discuss and plan for yet more ICT learning for young and old alike.

65. The school's work is characterised by a clear understanding of the needs of local villages, a genuine belief in the importance of the school leading the way to stimulate the community and a strong determination to help primary school colleagues. The school responds magnificently to identified curriculum limitations mainly in ICT, design and technology and mathematics. Regular, practical and well-planned support is lent to primary school teaching and support staff. As a result, primary and community partners hold the school in high esteem.
66. The work is bringing about a two-way benefit, with pupils entering the secondary school with increased levels of attainment, and continuing to make accelerated progress. Good numbers of adult learners are achieving qualifications in ICT and the concept of 'Lifelong Learning' in the community is accepted and sought after, with the school rightly perceived locally as a leader in this field.
67. Improvement of provision for 14-19 year-olds is at the heart of the school's search further to raise standards. Through the initiatives of the headteacher and, with support from the LEA, the school has joined collaborative projects with four neighbouring schools and a college of further education. An emerging partnership has brought advanced proposals to broaden sixth form provision by sharing resources and specialist college provision, both to extend further A-level and vocational courses.

## SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS UNIT

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and very good relationships result in good achievement for pupils with special educational needs.
- There are very good systems for assessing the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Some individual education plans are not precise enough to let achievement be measured.
- There is insufficient checking on the quality of teaching and learning by the special educational needs co-ordinator.

## Commentary

68. Fully integrated into the school, the pupils with special educational needs follow an identical curriculum to the rest and they achieve well. Regular reviews of progress, individual teacher records and the performance of Year 11 pupils clearly demonstrate good achievement. All pupils with special educational needs passed GCSE exams in 2003. Students with special educational needs also achieve well in the sixth form. Positive attitudes and very good relationships between staff and pupils produce high levels of self-motivation and help to raise standards. Pupils are keen to do the best for their teachers. Achievement is most consistent in the learning support rooms as a result of very good relationships, effective teaching and developing use of computers. Achievement in other lessons is satisfactory, but sometimes teaching fails to cater for individual needs.
69. Teaching is good. Pupils make best progress in lessons where teachers plan to meet the needs of these pupils and use learning support assistants well. However, language skills are inconsistently developed, for example, by a lack of focus on key words for new topics or through opportunities for pupils to talk about their work. There is a lack of evidence of practical work in some mathematics lessons for pupils with special educational needs. As a result, pupils are unable to make sensible estimates of weights, lengths and volumes.
70. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Very good assessment procedures identify these pupils, give a clear picture of individual needs and inform the writing of individual education plans, as well as providing clear indications of under or over-achievement. However, targets in some individual education plans are variable in quality and different styles confuse teachers. Some are not specific enough to be measurable or to give guidance to teachers when preparing lessons. As a result, assessment cannot be used effectively to measure progress towards these targets.
71. Good leadership and management have produced an effective team and thorough documentation that meets statutory requirements and gives useful guidelines to staff. The learning support and behaviour support systems work closely and very effectively as teams. Pupils with statements of special educational need have their progress reviewed appropriately and both parents and pupils are involved at all stages. Learning support assistants are suitably qualified and deployed though they have insufficient opportunity to plan with teachers prior to lessons. The special educational needs co-ordinator has more time than others to monitor the quality of teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs in subjects, but this is not used constructively enough to identify strengths and weaknesses.



## **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 **very good**.

##### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve very well in national tests and examinations.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work.
- Good teaching, including very good marking and advice about written work, raises standards.
- Too many classes are taught by more than one teacher.
- Low levels of disruptive behaviour occasionally affect learning.
- The best practice in marking and in planning appropriate activities for different abilities within the same class is not shared widely enough.

##### **Commentary**

72. Pupils starting in Year 7 have just above national average standards. Results of national tests for 14 year-olds in 2002 were well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. These results indicate very good levels of achievement. GCSE results in 2002 were above average in English. Results in English literature were below average but an unusually high proportion of pupils was entered. Results were below average in drama where good performance skills are often undermined by weaknesses in writing.
73. Most pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 9. They speak clearly and confidently and draw upon wide vocabularies. They listen attentively to teachers and each other with quick understanding when working as a class or in groups. Reading is generally accurate and pupils understand at least the main ideas. An above average proportion recognises significant detail and understands implication. The number depending on the help of teachers to gain more than basic understanding is smaller than usual. In written work, pupils use language that is appropriate to the task and often drawn from rich vocabularies. They write accurately in sentences and paragraphs and make effective use of a variety of sentence patterns. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Lower attainers, including those with special educational needs, mostly show some ambition in their choice of words. They communicate their main ideas clearly but make spelling, punctuation and elementary grammar mistakes.
74. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Standards are above average. Pupils benefit from the good subject knowledge of their teachers. Standards of writing improve, especially because pupils are encouraged by teachers' comments on their strengths and accept advice on how they might improve further. Pupils become able to organise their material and express ideas clearly. They provide arguments and evidence to support their opinions. At all stages, the attainment of boys is higher than that of boys nationally, but girls are achieving even more highly and the gap between them and the boys is widening. Girls considerably outnumber boys in the top sets.
75. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' effort, behaviour and achievement. They plan their lessons very well and, in the best examples, ensure that pupils at all levels of attainment are always appropriately challenged. The quality of marking is variable, but mostly it is of very high quality. Teachers identify

strengths in pupils' writing and advise on the means of further improvement. Pupils want to learn. They are highly motivated and seek to meet teachers' expectations and advice. In a small number of lessons, two or three are occasionally inattentive and this reduces the quality of their learning.

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

In one excellent Year 10 drama lesson, pupils with a very wide range of general attainment and attitudes all made excellent gains in understanding and in the skills of performance. They got involved, showing exceptionally high levels of imagination, with the very demanding work set by the teacher. From a warm-up exercise, directly linked to the theme of the lesson, 'Breathing as an aspect of performance', pairs of pupils devised and performed excellently climbing scenes in which breathing and line delivery showed very clearly effort, situation and emotion. Moving into the delivery of a speech from Shakespeare's King John, in which the punctuation determined the pace of delivery, the excited pupils identified perceptively how their voice control, pace of delivery and projection of emotion had been affected. Pupils were finally introduced to a system of text notation on which practice and subsequent homework reinforced skills and understanding well beyond reasonable expectation and to the delight of all.

76. Leadership and management of the department are very good; the department has a clear sense of direction. There is effective division of management responsibilities. Greater use should be made of opportunities for sharing the best teaching practice. Owing to timetable constraints, too many classes are taught by more than one teacher and achievement is undermined as a result.

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

77. Standards of literacy across all subjects are above average and, in almost all classes, pupils have appropriate writing skills to demonstrate how much they know and how well they understand. Reading proficiency is above average and pupils are able to cope with the demands of each subject well. Those with learning difficulties are helped to overcome their early limitations and they do so, achieving well as a result. Class discussions in such subjects as citizenship, art, mathematics, music, drama and physical education, are good; pupils are able to communicate their ideas orally often very well. Provision made is especially effective in raising the standards of those in the top two-thirds of the ability range and of those who are on the register of special educational needs. The rest receive insufficient guidance in some subjects on how to organise longer pieces of writing, to express their ideas clearly and to present their work to best effect. The quality of provision is also inconsistent in other respects. In the best examples, pupils have good opportunities to discuss and write at length for a variety of purposes. They are taught to use and understand the specialist and general vocabularies they need to know for work being studied. However, in science, for example, there is not enough use of technical terms.

#### **Modern foreign languages**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results in French and German are above the national average, but well below those in the other subjects the pupils take.
- Pupils' listening skills are well developed.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and their behaviour is very good.
  
- There is underachievement, especially among higher and lower attainers.
- Pupils are not confident in speaking and responding.
- Assessment is not used effectively to ensure all pupils achieve as well as they should.
- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.

## Commentary

78. Standards are average in French and German. In GCSE examinations in French and German in 2002 the proportion of candidates achieving A\*-C grades was above average, but pupils do much better in other subjects than they do in languages. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that pupils attain below average standards, but inspection evidence does not support this; test results are unduly pessimistic, standards are average overall. Listening and reading skills are well developed; pupils respond promptly and appropriately to questions and instructions in French and German and identify specific detail from extracts of speech and short texts. Pupils are not confident in responding spontaneously to questioning or in manipulating the languages themselves to express their views. In French, their pronunciation is adversely affected by their dependence on the written form of the language. Average and higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of grammar in both languages and, following a model, apply it successfully in writing and in speech. Pupils do not write creatively or at length. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs communicate satisfactorily using set phrases and writing to a model. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls in lessons, although in examinations girls do better than boys. Most pupils achieve satisfactorily but some higher and lower attainers underachieve.
79. Pupils' attitudes are positive; they settle quickly and listen attentively. When given the opportunity, they work well in pairs and small groups and concentrate well. Boys, in particular, participate enthusiastically in games and respond well to competition in lessons.
80. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but, as with achievement, there is considerable inconsistency. Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons, building on what has gone before because of careful planning by the teachers. They do not always achieve as well as they should because they have too few opportunities to use the languages themselves. Activities and resources are appropriate and well sequenced. Teachers' command of the languages they teach is very good and the language being learned is used extensively and effectively to conduct activities in most lessons; as a result, pupils' listening skills are well developed. Clear presentations of new language enable pupils rapidly to understand and use the language themselves in response to skilful questioning. The board and OHT are also used effectively to identify language patterns. Achievement is too often restricted because pupils only repeat what the teacher has said instead of giving and gathering information. Assessment information is not used effectively to support lower attaining pupils or to provide an effective challenge for higher attainers. Marking is inconsistent across the department and, although there is some very helpful feedback, there is also ineffective marking, an unresolved issue from the previous inspection.
81. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory; issues raised in the previous inspection have not been adequately addressed and standards have declined. Teaching and learning strategies have not been effectively monitored or evaluated and assessment is not used effectively to monitor or plan progress. There remains significant inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the department and teachers do not work effectively as a team to share good practice.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is very good.
- Pupils' attitude towards learning is very good.
- ICT is used very well to support pupils' learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teachers' use of assessment information about pupils needs to improve.

### Commentary

82. The very good curriculum enables pupils of all abilities to follow appropriate courses and attain standards that are above average in all years. In Year 7, pupils attain a particularly high standard in statistics. Additional classes to support pupils are proving very successful. The curriculum is also enhanced by the entry of all Years 7 and 8 pupils in the national Mathematics Challenge competition. The higher attaining pupils are particularly well catered for with accelerated learning classes beginning in Year 7 and working through to Year 11. Early entry to GCSE in Year 10 is providing very good results and optional national tests in Years 7 and 8 are showing many pupils are attaining a standard that is well above average. Pupils with special educational needs are also well catered for. They achieve well in Years 7 to 9 lessons because the relationships between pupils and the teachers are excellent. By Year 11, pupils' achievements are good because teachers use a wide range of resources well to motivate and encourage them.
83. Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They are keen learners and want to do well. Pupils' learning is enhanced by the teachers' good use of ICT in lessons. Pupils' understanding of topics improves because they are encouraged to use calculators to check answers, and computers are used well to assist with explanations. Teaching and learning across all year groups in the school are good. Teachers' planning of lessons is particularly good and numeracy skills are taught well. When these encouraging points are linked with good quality discussion in class amongst the teacher and pupils and pupils themselves, the achievements they make in Years 10 and 11 are good and very good in Years 7 to 9.
84. In 2002, the national test results for Year 9 pupils were above average. Compared to similar schools results were average. In GCSE examinations, results were slightly above average and the proportion of pupils attaining the top A\* grade was more than double the national figure. Figures for 2003 are about the same as 2002.
85. The department is very well led and there is a clear vision about how standards can be raised further. The good handbook and schemes of work help the relatively new team of teachers to work in a consistent manner. Work seen in some books is now of a higher standard than was the case last year. Although improvements since the previous inspection have been good – achievements made at the end of Year 9 have improved and mathematics is now taught much more effectively, the very high standards set by the department have not yet been reached. Pupils' progress is tracked very well using ICT, but teachers do not make the best use of this information. Pupils' progress is hindered because the information generated from teachers' day-to-day assessment of pupils is not used effectively to plan future work, as a result, teachers sometimes set work that does not always match the abilities of the pupils.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

86. The use of mathematics skills is taught well across a number of subjects and contributes to the good achievements made by pupils in mathematics generally. The geography department, for example, provides very good guidance on using statistics when doing coursework activities for GCSE. There is, however, no conscious practice across all subjects to raise standards in mathematics.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are very good.
- The quality of teaching is good throughout the school.
- A very well led team of mutually supportive subject specialists teaches science.
- The detailed assessment of pupils' progress particularly during the GCSE course raises standards.
- The marking of pupils' work lacks consistency in its detail across the department.
- There are too few resources for pupils to use ICT in laboratories to help learning.
- Writing is not emphasised enough up to the end of Year 9.

### Commentary

87. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Results were well above all schools in the national tests in 2002 and had improved each year up to then. In 2003, the school's science results exceeded both those of the previous year and the target set by the school.
88. Based on their prior attainment as 11 year-olds, in 2002 pupils in Year 9 attained standards above those expected in similar schools. The attainment of pupils at GCSE based on their attainment at the end of Year 9 was in line with similar schools. In many lessons pupils achieve above what is expected because of the good teaching methods, which stimulate and keep their interest, so encouraging them to learn well.
89. At GCSE, whilst results are above all schools nationally, there has been a drop in the percentage of pupils attaining the higher grades for each of the three years up to 2002. During that period the department experienced considerable staffing difficulties and absences. Achievement was satisfactory, nonetheless. Results in 2003 show a definite improvement on the previous year. Standards seen in lessons reflect those attained in tests and most recent examinations.
90. Teaching is good. It is slightly better up to the end of Year 9, reflecting the attention paid to improving teaching and learning in the school. The best lessons have a good pace and plenty of different activities to keep pupils interested and involved, such as using Year 9 pupils to 'teach' their fellows about aspects of energy. Practical activities support learning well and are very well organised by the team of technicians. Pupils with special educational needs only learn well when work, such as easily read sheets, is pitched at the correct level; this does not happen invariably. Support staff help individual pupils considerably by playing an integral part in the lesson. Whilst many teachers use the available ICT to reinforce learning, there is insufficient equipment in laboratories for all pupils to experience using ICT for themselves. This weakness was raised at the previous inspection.
91. Pupils' attitudes to their work are very good. Most are very well behaved, keen to do well and so learn well. The presentation of written work is often good with pupils taking a pride in their work.

Whilst there are many occasions where pupils can develop the skills of writing and speaking at GCSE, in Years 7 to 9 the skills of writing are not developed enough. Key words relevant to the lesson are not always displayed and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to write their own conclusions to their experiments or write in other ways about science.

92. The department is using well the wealth of data provided by the school about pupils' progress through the years. Systems are in place to monitor each pupil's progress, particularly through the GCSE course, to set target grades and identify and react to underachievement by individual pupils. However, the detail provided in the correction of pupils' written work includes too few suggestions on how to improve the work.
93. There is a strong sense of teamwork within the very well led staff, but there is a failure to share good practice enough.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils reach high standards in Years 7 to 11.
- There are very good assessment systems for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Achievement at both key stages is good.
- Progress since the previous inspection is very good.
- Work is not always planned to challenge the more able and talented students or to help pupils with special educational needs.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning by the head of department.

### **Commentary**

94. The technology college initiative is making a very substantial impact on this subject. Teacher assessment of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003 indicates standards that are well above those expected. There has been some improvement on the previous year's results, particularly in the higher grades. The standard of work seen in Year 9 is well above expected levels. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 are well above the national average and standards seen during the inspection reflect these results. The proportion of pupils attaining a higher, A\*-C, grade is also well above the national average.
95. By the end of Year 9, pupils use a good range of software, such as word processing, desk top publishing, spreadsheets and slide presentations. They are able to evaluate web sites and understand the importance of presentation. Their achievement is good, even though they have some non-specialist teachers who have fewer skills to stretch the pupils.
96. By Year 11, pupils can use a good variety of skills for their GCSE project course work. Very thorough on-going assessment helps to raise standards; it involves the pupils themselves, so they learn what to do to improve. Coursework in Years 10 and 11 helps to train pupils to work independently, as they are able to retrieve or store information on other computers, including those in the library.
97. Teaching is good. Lessons given by permanent specialist staff are significantly better. Particular strengths include the management of pupils, good knowledge and understanding of the subject, effective monitoring and support for pupils whilst working and very good relationships. As a result, pupils behave well and do not waste time. Well-planned, effective lessons are targeted effectively at individual needs, so learning is good. Achievement in these lessons is often very good, because self motivated pupils also draw readily upon skills they have acquired beforehand, often on their own.

98. Day-to-day management is good, and good schemes of work, and assessment systems are well implemented. As a result, weak areas are identified and improved, and standards raised. Leadership is good. There is clear vision to further raise standards, and to support the use of ICT across the rest of the school. However, there is too little monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure consistency of approach, particularly of temporary or non-specialist teaching. There have, nonetheless, been very good improvements since the previous inspection.

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

99. The library is well equipped with up-to-date computers from which pupils research frequently information on the Internet. Heavily used ICT rooms are available to pupils after school; they provide good opportunities for them to continue their studies independently. Most departments have planned use of ICT in their schemes of work. Teachers have undertaken training to develop their skills in the use of ICT in their subjects and very many are keen to use the technology to reinforce the pupils' learning. In design and technology good use is made of ICT ranging from systems and control in Year 7 to the use of drawing software in Year 10. Other departments make good use of computer equipment in their teaching rooms, including data projectors and interactive white boards. Much improved since the previous inspection, good use is made of ICT in mathematics, English, physical education and science, although, on occasion, demand outstrips provision. A lack of access to computers restricts the range of activity in art and design, especially in advanced classes. History and modern foreign languages make little use of the ICT in their teaching.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of their subject.
- Assessment is very good; pupils are very well prepared for their examinations.
- Pupils' very good attitude to their studies raises achievement.
- Sometimes, the needs of lower attainers are insufficiently met.

### **Commentary**

100. There is very good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Pupils acquire a very good knowledge of geographical vocabulary, skills and ideas. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is above average overall and higher attainers are reaching standards well above what is expected of pupils of the same age. This reflects the teachers' assessment in 2002. The very sound learning that takes place in Years 7 to 9 provides a very good foundation for the GCSE course and in Years 10 and 11 pupils who continue achieve well. They demonstrate their very good knowledge of geography in well argued essays and make good use of well-developed fieldwork skills to complete their GCSE coursework to a high standard. Pupils' very positive attitude to their studies makes a significant contribution to their learning in all years. Standards are well above average.
101. Results in the GCSE examinations are consistently well above average. In 2002 they were significantly above the national average for both boys and girls and these standards have been maintained in 2003. However, more girls reached the higher grades than did boys.

102. Teaching and learning are good throughout. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to ensure that pupils' learning progresses well from Year 7 to Year 11. Work in lessons is well varied and good use is made of photographs and videos to capture pupils' interest and to develop their understanding. However, in some lessons, the introductory phase is too long, which slows pupils' acquisition of new learning. Pupils' individual needs are generally met, but lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, often require more step-by-step help.
103. Assessment procedures are very good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are very well prepared for their examinations. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the requirements of the course and ensure that pupils understand what they need to accomplish. Pupils' coursework booklets provide excellent guidance and are also used to inform parents of their child's progress.
104. Leadership and management are very good. Strong leadership has welded the department into a cohesive and supportive team, which is committed to the maintenance of high standards. Clear guidance ensures consistency. There is effective monitoring of all aspects of the subject's performance and there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have been consistently well above average.
- High expectations and challenge lead to good achievement by pupils.
- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 enables pupils to succeed in GCSE examinations.
- Very good assessment and feedback to pupils helps them improve their work.
- Very good leadership of the subject has maintained high standards.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to the subject and behave very well in lessons.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.
- Occasionally there is a mismatch of work set and materials for some lower ability pupils.

### Commentary

105. Standards of attainment by Year 9 are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and their skills of using historical sources are all above average; their writing is very good. By Year 11, overall standards are well above average and pupils' achievement is very good. Pupils' skills of using and evaluating historical sources are very good. Many pupils produce a very high standard of analytical writing. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily. Over recent years, GCSE results have consistently been well above average. In 2002, GCSE results were also well above average. Girls' attainment was higher than that of boys. GCSE results in 2003 show a further improvement on the previous year.
106. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are good and in Years 10 and 11 they are very good. There are a number of consistent strengths. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and they present it in imaginative ways to interest and motivate pupils. Pupils are regularly challenged to think for themselves. Teachers have high expectations; as a result, pupils work hard and behave very well. Lessons are well planned. Teachers assess pupils' work very thoroughly and give them very good feedback. Pupils, therefore, understand how to improve and what progress they are making towards their targets. The skills essential to examination success are taught very systematically throughout the GCSE course. However, teachers and pupils do not make sufficient use of ICT to reinforce learning, for example, in



producing high quality reprographic materials. Occasionally, pupils of lower ability need more support through different levels of task or materials.

107. Leadership of the department is very good and management good. The head of department provides a very good model of professional practice. His clear commitment to maintaining high standards has proven successful. The department is an effective team. Checking the quality of the department's work is good with sound systems in place, but there is a lack of innovation, especially in the contribution ICT can make to learning.
108. The history department is now well staffed with specialist teachers. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very positive. The GCSE curriculum is varied and interesting and makes good use of the local historical environment to motivate pupils in their coursework.
109. The department has sustained the high quality reported at the previous inspection and standards in Years 7 to 9 have improved. The very high standards at GCSE level have been maintained.

## Religious education

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to very good learning.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good leadership and management ensure effective planning.
- Suitable resources for lower attaining pupils are under-used
- Inconsistent marking on occasion does not help pupils improve.

### Commentary

110. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average and pupils are achieving well, given the average level of attainment on entry. They are able to identify the main features of several religions, understand the significance of symbolism and ritual, and reflect on the connection between belief and behaviour. Pupils are able to make moral judgements, taking into account more than one point of view, but have yet to develop more extended writing skills. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily, but they do not always move on in their learning quickly enough because they find the work a bit too hard. Marking is inconsistent; it sometimes lacks enough helpful comments to tell the pupils how to improve.
111. By the end of Year 11, pupils' knowledge and understanding are well developed in relation to the expectations of the GCSE short course syllabus, taken by all pupils. They have a good knowledge of Christian perspectives on moral and social issues and can make mature and thoughtful statements on topics such as marriage or moral dilemmas such as abortion and euthanasia. Both boys and girls achieve very well at this stage because they are taught well and because of the very good attitudes they bring to their work.
112. Results in the 2002 GCSE examination were above average and recent very good results sustain a rising trend.
113. The quality of teaching is very good. Pupils benefit from knowledgeable teachers who plan and structure lessons well and capture the interest and involvement of all the pupils. The pace of learning is very often brisk, teachers' expectations are high and pupils are challenged to think for themselves. Sometimes, however, there is a readiness on the part of a teacher to congratulate achievement where it is not deserved, particularly in written work. Homework is used well to reinforce learning and to encourage research. Learning is also

very good because pupils show an interest in the subject, work co-operatively and can concentrate for long periods.

114. The department is led and managed very well; very clear vision and direction is provided and all teachers work well together and are committed to improvement. A positive feature is the implementation of strategies to encourage logical thinking and extended writing skills early on, so that pupils are equipped to achieve well at GCSE and A-Level.

115. The department continues to make the very good progress noted in the previous inspection.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching promotes good learning at all levels.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and aid progress.
- Results in GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- There is a need to develop drawing as an aspect of designing.

#### **Commentary**

116. Pupils show a good range of skills across the wide range of activities provided. At the end of Year 9, boys and girls achieve equally well and pupils with special educational needs achieve success at a wide range of levels. For the same reason, gifted and talented pupils make appropriate progress. Good imagination is evident in design and pupils' confidence in the use of computers reflects the emphasis placed upon ICT and the school's status as a technology college. Designing is imaginative, but drawing, as an element in the development of a design, is comparatively weak and presentations suffer to an extent.

117. Pupils gained well above average results in GCSE examinations in the most recent year. Results in food technology were particularly good and represent very high levels of achievement. The level of achievement generally both in examinations, and also in the well above average work seen during the inspection, is very good.

118. Attainment and progress are good in the vocational courses offered in engineering and health and social care. In both cases, pupils achieve well in relation to prior attainment. Girls, at this stage, achieve better results than do boys.

119. The quality of teaching is good. Work is prepared well and carefully organised in all lessons. Good use is made of different teaching methods, including demonstrations, team teaching and one-to-one tuition. The best teaching seen was in textiles, where very good use was made of observed drawing as a basis for fabric design. Learning is purposeful at all levels. Pupils show a high level of interest and very good behaviour and concentration aid their progress in class.

120. Assessment is thorough and the innovative practice of allowing pupils to lift their grades by improving or adding to work already marked is an excellent form of motivation.

121. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Relationships between staff are very good and lead to good co-operation generally. The separate areas of work within the

department are well co-ordinated and new appointments of young and enthusiastic staff complement the more experienced teachers well.

122. Since the previous inspection standards have improved significantly at all levels. Management and innovation are now major strengths and improved accommodation is raising achievement very substantially.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Pupils behave well and respond very positively.
- The management of the department is good.
- The department offers a wide range of experience and opportunities to the pupils.
- ICT is not used enough to develop work creatively.
- The independent learning skills of boys are weak.
- Accommodation for examination classes is poor.

#### **Commentary**

123. In the most recent assessment tests, most pupils achieved well above national expectations. Most pupils achieve well. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. Pupils use technical skills well and show a good developing knowledge of art and artists. They are quick to grasp the importance of well-observed drawing because of imaginative teaching of proportion. Pupils learn quickly because the course gives them a sound understanding how to produce works of art. They also learn well by studying recognised artists' work and art and design from different cultures; they learn new techniques which they apply, often well, to their work. ICT is used well for the research of artists, but it is not used enough for creative development.
124. By Year 11, pupils are achieving standards that are in line with the national average. Pupils take more responsibility for their own projects and they make greater progress where they can use independent learning skills. Girls achieve better than do boys, whose work often lacks attention to research detail and projects are not always completed. Generally, pupils work confidently using suitable materials and processes to express their creative ideas. They build well on prior skills and explore and interpret effectively other artists' creations, for instance, for still-life work. Pupils who start the course with below average skills and understanding achieve well. Poor resources for ICT within the department restrict the pupils' ability to use it to extend and develop work.
125. Since the previous inspection, higher-grade, A\*-C, GCSE results have risen to slightly above the national average, but they fell dramatically in 2002 because of staffing instability. In 2003, they increased to the previous level. Girls do better than boys.
126. The quality of teaching is very good, consequently pupils improve and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding consistently, so learning is very good. The teachers' high expectations create a positive learning environment. They bend over backwards to try to improve the care boys take with their work. In the very best lessons, teachers give very clear explanations, demonstrate techniques well and build in an element of humour to maintain pupils' interest. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well because teachers

give a high level of support that channels their strengths into successful outcomes. Work is marked well; it shows pupils clearly how to improve.

127. Pupils enjoy art and design and their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Equipment is shared co-operatively and pupils respect each other's work and opinions. Lunchtime classes are popular and pupils enjoy participating in community projects, such as the painting of murals.
128. The department is well led and managed and offers a wide range of experiences and opportunities to the pupils. Curriculum initiatives, such as life drawing classes and visits to art galleries and museums, strongly support the pupils' learning. Art makes a strong contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Literacy strategies are well supported by good wall displays. However, classrooms are too small for examination groups and the situation is aggravated by the poor provision of sinks.

## Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching with high expectations results in good learning.
- Effective leadership with a strong commitment to improvement is contributing well to pupils' progress.
- A legacy of staffing turbulence still has a depressing effect upon standards.
- Poor accommodation and resources also hinder achievement.

### Commentary

129. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are below average. Pupils' grasp of basic musical skills is weak, owing in large measure to staffing problems. Knowledge of musical terms and the ability to locate notes on the keyboard are unsatisfactory. Improvement is taking place; in Year 8 standards are average because of the good quality teaching which is now evident.
130. Results in the 2002 GCSE examination were above average. The achievement of pupils in Year 11 is unsatisfactory. Standards are below average; this is the result of the disruption to learning mentioned above. Few of these pupils are instrumentalists and lack confidence and creative ability in their compositions. Year 10 pupils form, by contrast, a competent instrumentalist group. As they have above average musical knowledge and skills, their original compositions are very inventive. They perform with sensitivity, attention to dynamics and a pleasing musicality, responding well to the high standards asked of them.
131. Both teaching and learning are good. Pupils benefit from knowledgeable teachers. Lessons are well structured and capture the interest and involvement of all pupils. Pupils respond to the teachers' high expectations with enthusiasm because very good monitoring of their progress encourages them to make creative and intellectual effort; it shows them how they can improve. A strong feature is the way in which pupils show an interest in the activities, work co-operatively and concentrate; pupils with special educational needs participate and come on satisfactorily. Teaching effectiveness is limited by the poor accommodation and minimum resources, which do not allow the proper practice of the ensemble playing that is an essential component of the curriculum and examination requirements at GCSE.
132. Leadership and management are very good with a clear vision and commitment to improvement. Very good support is given to staff training and connections with musicians

outside the school enrich learning. Music is making a good impact on the life of the school, for example, involvement in a very successful production last term and a thriving choir and orchestra that perform to a good standard. Since the previous inspection standards have fallen, but are now rising swiftly and given more suitable accommodation this department is set to become a strength of the school.

## Physical Education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above the national average at GCSE and improving.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good.
- Relationships with pupils are excellent.
- A wide range of well-supported extra-curricular activities is well supported by pupils.
- The amount of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 is too low.

### Commentary

133. From a below average start at the school, pupils achieve well, so that, by the end of Year 9, standards are mostly in line with those expected, except in hockey and basketball where low attainers are below average. Pupils understand the rules of games and they make good progress in their learning, but not all pupils know why a warm-up is important. Pupils with special educational needs or a disability are fully integrated into lessons and achieve well.
134. Pupils achieve satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11, standards are in line with those expected, although they are below in netball. In athletics, pupils' performance in javelin throwing is below average, but this is a new activity for them and they achieve well. Knowledge and understanding are well developed. Those pupils taking the GCSE examination achieve well because of their positive attitudes and good teaching. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2002 were above average. Results improved in 2003.
135. Teaching and learning are good, so pupils achieve well. Teachers have a high level of knowledge, they plan well and have excellent relationships with pupils, whose attitudes are often excellent. Pupils respond to instructions, listen attentively and collaborate very well in groups. Concentration and enthusiasm are strong features of pupils' attitudes. Pupils studying the GCSE course make good progress because of the particularly brisk pace in their lessons. Good PowerPoint presentations, using ICT, reinforce the good quality of teaching. Regular marking of written work is unsatisfactory, as it does not show pupils clearly enough how to improve.
136. The amount of time allocated to the subject for Years 10 and 11 is not enough to cover the National Curriculum programmes of study, so pupils lose out, particularly as the school has no gymnasium or dance studio. The Junior Sports Leaders Award is successful and encourages strong links with primary schools. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer to pupils and a high proportion of pupils have achieved success at regional, county and national level. School teams are also successful.
137. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has very good curriculum awareness, leading very successfully. The very good development plan has realistic targets. Work is checked very thoroughly. Assessment procedures and schemes of work have improved since the previous inspection. The department has a clear vision and is progressive in its work.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

In Years 10 and 11, two lessons of **business studies** were sampled. **Standards** in GCSE examinations and in the lesson are **well above average**. **Teaching was very good**; learners built a strong information base from which to develop greater understanding of the differences between successful and unsuccessful business activity.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A clear commitment to developing citizenship throughout the school shows very clearly.
- Very good use of the school council supports the citizenship curriculum.
- Effective leadership of the subject has a clear vision for its further development.
- A clear reflection of the values promoted within citizenship lessons permeates the wider life of the school.
- Very good participation by pupils in charitable activities is an important part of very good moral development.
- The training needs for the teaching staff have not yet been met.
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress need further development.

### **Commentary**

138. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 9 and, by the end of Year 11, standards are above average and achievement is good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 show a good understanding of social issues and have good skills of discussion. They can deploy their knowledge, express and justify their opinions and they can understand the opinions of others.
139. In lessons, teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory, and in Years 10 and 11 they are good. Skilled teaching in Years 10 and 11 helps pupils to understand conflicting viewpoints on controversial issues. In Years 7 to 9 some teachers do not yet have the full repertoire of skills and experience to deliver this new subject well. The citizenship content of lessons is not consistently made explicit and clear to pupils. Assessment, recording and reporting are being developed but need refinement: these will eventually have to include an assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding as well as their skills.
140. Leadership of the subject is good and management is satisfactory. Preparation for the introduction of citizenship began early. The subject co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of the subject and a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses at this stage. Good planning has enabled citizenship to be integrated with religious education and with personal, social and health education. Enrichment opportunities through focus days are used effectively to teach further important parts of the citizenship curriculum. Sensitive to the needs of pupils in the area and the inherent challenges of racism, the curriculum reinforces that of religious studies very well and places a strong emphasis upon multi-cultural issues from the start. Staff training needs for those teaching this new subject have begun to be identified but have not yet been met. Monitoring of pupils' progress and of the quality of teaching and learning needs further systematic development.

141. Pupils' attitudes are very positive and pupils respond very well to the many opportunities for developing citizenship outside formal lessons. The school council and year forums give very good opportunities for all pupils to participate in real elections, to take responsibility and to play a part in decision making within the school community. A committee of staff and sixth form students ensures that every class is actively involved in fundraising activities to support charities. Year 8 pupils are involved in a research project on litter and waste. Further opportunities for pupils to participate in active citizenship are planned, exploiting the school's very good links with the local community. The responsible conduct of pupils in the wider school community is a clear reflection of the values promoted in citizenship lessons.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

### 2002 Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	80.0	90.0	20.0	42.7	34.0	39.0
English/English language	6	83.3	92.0	50.0	29.9	41.7	35.7
Design and technology	7	57.1	89.2	0.0	32.0	17.1	35.7
General Studies	20	95.0	78.6	10.0	25.7	27.0	30.0
Geography	7	100	88.3	42.9	36.4	38.6	36.3
History	8	87.5	91.8	12.5	37.2	30.0	37.8
Information technology	8	87.5	78.2	12.5	20.6	28.8	28.5
Other social studies	14	57.1	83.2	14.3	32.5	19.3	37.9
Religious studies	8	87.5	90.9	37.5	38.9	32.5	37.9
Sociology	5	80.0	83.7	40.0	33.6	36.0	33.8
Vocational studies	7	14.3	67.6	0	21.9	4.3	25.6
Total	118	78.0	86.0	20.3	33.6	27.8	34.8

### 2002 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
Accounting	7	86	NA	57	NA	74.3	NA
Art and design	9	100	96.1	44.4	48.7	93.3	85.1
Biology	9	100	91.6	44.4	36.3	80.0	74.1
Business studies	15	100	96.4	53.3	32.8	90.7	76.5
Chemistry	8	100	94.0	62.5	45.9	92.5	81.1
Drama	8	100	98.1	75.0	41.5	97.5	82.9
English/English language	6	100	98.3	33.3	36.5	90.0	80.1
English literature	12	100	98.5	75.0	43.7	105.0	84.3
French	6	100	96.2	33.3	46.1	80.0	83.0
Design and technology	9	100	95.3	33.3	35.5	77.8	76.5
General studies	75	90.7	90.1	21.3	29.1	64.5	69.3
Geography	34	100	97.1	70.6	40.5	97.1	80.9
German	5	100	96.3	20.0	44.3	60.0	82.1
History	23	100	97.1	52.2	41.0	88.7	81.2
Information technology	12	100	89.1	25.0	22.4	75.0	64.1



Law	2	100	NA	50	NA	100	NA
Mathematics	8	100	93.3	75.0	52.2	100	84.7
Music	5	100	97.7	40.0	41.8	92.0	82.2
Other social studies	8	100	94.3	12.5	38.9	70.0	77.7
Physics	9	100	92.8	55.6	42.8	88.9	78.6
Religious studies	11	100	96.3	18.2	44.0	65.5	82.2
Sociology	8	100	95.4	25.0	39.6	70.0	79.1
Sports/PE studies	5	100	95.4	60.0	29.5	88.0	73.2
Vocational studies	6	100	84.5	66.7	23.8	86.7	60.6
Total	301	97.6	94.8	42.5	39.4	81.4	78.6

### **Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care	5	100	90.1	25		0	18.5

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

### **English**

**The focus of the inspection was English Literature. Lessons were also sampled in drama and English language.**

A-level results in English language have improved annually since 2000 when they were below average. They rose to well above average in 2002. Although there are no available national comparisons, the 2003 results were much higher than those of the year before. The observed English language lesson showed that most students are adapting well to the challenge of work at this level and standards are satisfactory. Good teaching was based upon very good subject knowledge and very good lesson planning. The pace of learning was slowed by the need for the teacher to ensure that all members of a large group, including some newcomers with little previous experience of working in English, understood the main differences between dialect and accent.

In a Year 13 drama lesson, students demonstrated skills appropriate to the demands of the course. They were able to vary readings of the leading lady's speeches in 'Taming of the Shrew' to illustrate a range of possible interpretations, sometimes with high sophistication and subtlety. The style of teaching was appropriately challenging so the students could arrive at their own decisions about performance.

### **English literature**

Provision in English literature is **very good**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examination results have been consistently above average and in 2002 were well above average.

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their work.

### **Commentary**

142. In each of the last six years, all students have passed examinations with grades that matched and often exceeded expectation based upon earlier attainment. In 2002, results were especially good with most students gaining A-B grades.
143. Current standards are above average and there is very good achievement. Students in Year 12 are building securely and rapidly on skills established earlier matching expectations based upon previous standards. They understand that a play, such as 'A Streetcar Named Desire', can have a number of contexts relevant to their exploration of themes, characters and relationships. They are interested and are well motivated, working efficiently, for example, to complete group discussions within demanding time limits.
144. Students in Year 13 achieve very well. They are good at analysing texts and are quick to identify style as well as meaning. Their quality of learning is increased by their confident responses to challenging questions asked by teachers. Responses are based upon students' good understanding of present and previous work and the very positive relationships they have with teachers and each other. Written work is of very good quality because almost all students know how to organise their material, how to present arguments and opinions that are well supported by reference to texts, and by the use of quotations. Very good assessment of the students' work raises standards. Students benefit considerably from the very good constructive criticism of their work by teachers in annotations and detailed comments on their writing.
145. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the texts they teach. They are skilful in using questions to engage pupils in their learning and to explore possible interpretations beyond the obvious. They make appropriate use of a variety of teaching methods, so students learn to work within a full class, in small groups and as individuals. They constantly demand that students should work at pace and in depth. Students respond positively because they are well motivated and because relationships are good.
146. Management of courses in the sixth form is very good and there has been a good improvement since the previous inspection. There is effective matching of teachers' interests and skills to the demands of the curriculum and a shared emphasis on enabling students to develop their own ideas and skills as independent learners. Good numbers of students select the course; retention is very good.

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

147. Standards of literacy are above average. Students express their ideas clearly and accurately in speech and in writing. They make suitable use of technical terms related to the topics being studied and most draw upon wide general vocabularies.

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

#### **French**

Provision in French is **unsatisfactory**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses:**

- Students have very positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Listening skills are well developed.

- The teachers' very good command of the language makes them excellent models.
- The quality of teaching is just satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress in lessons.
- Standards are average but students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Students do not gain sufficiently in independence in using the language themselves; they lack confidence in speaking and accuracy in writing.
- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.

## Commentary

148. In AS and A-level examinations in 2002 standards attained were well below average and there was significant underachievement. In 2003, examination results improved and were above average, but inspection evidence indicates that standards in the present Years 12 and 13 are well below average. Students have a limited range of language at their disposal and lack confidence in applying grammar rules in speech and writing to express their ideas. Their speech and writing contain many basic errors, which inhibit their ability to speak in French. Listening skills are well developed and students respond appropriately, but briefly, to instructions and questioning in French. They identify the main points from a variety of texts but are heavily dependent upon glossaries and dictionaries to do this.
149. The quality of teaching and learning in lessons is just satisfactory. Teachers' command of French is very good and students benefit from the extensive use of the language in lessons to develop their listening skills. Resources and activities are appropriate but students rely too heavily on the teacher to complete work successfully. They make the best progress when they are required to work in pairs and small groups to explore their ideas and then report back to the group. The use of computers to improve students' grasp of grammar rules using computer programs is yet to have a significant impact upon their standards. The level of challenge in lessons is sometimes too low; teachers' slow questioning is designed to allow students to succeed but this is often counter-productive, as it fails to foster the students' confidence.
150. Students' attitudes towards their work are very positive and they appreciate the help their teachers give and the opportunity to work closely with the French language 'assistante' to improve their speaking skills. They concentrate on work set and listen attentively in lessons, but they do not show enough initiative or confidence as learners to become really fluent.
151. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The action taken to develop teaching and learning styles, which will raise standards, has been inadequate and has resulted in significant underachievement since students fail to build successfully on high standards achieved at the end of Year 11. There have been no clear improvements, so progress since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. Numbers selecting the course are very low; German is not running at present. The few who choose to do a language stay the course.

## MATHEMATICS

**The focus of the inspection was A-level and AS level mathematics in the area of pure mathematics and statistics. GCSE retake classes were inspected.**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in A and AS level classes are well above average.
- Teaching and students' learning in A-level and AS level courses are very good.

- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are no courses available for non-specialist mathematics students to improve their mathematics.

## Commentary

152. Standards overall are well above average. In the 2002 examinations, results at A and AS level were well above average with three-quarters of students attaining A or B grades in A-level. Students attain higher standards in mathematics than in their other subjects. Standards of work seen during the inspection week and in students' folders match the high standards reached in the 2002 A level results. Standards are lower in AS level statistics, particularly for girls, although they are above average. In GCSE retake classes standards are average. Results for A and AS level examinations in 2003 are similar to the earlier ones. Value added is good and student retention is good.
153. Standards are high because the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject that enables them to provide very clear explanations of complex topics; this helps students understand what they are doing. Teachers have very good discussions with students often probing their understanding of ideas and challenging them to think carefully about their responses to questions. Students usually rise to the challenge responding enthusiastically and sensibly. The questions raised by students demonstrate their interest motivation to learn and do better.

### Example of outstanding practice

In a model A-level lesson finding where graphs intersect, the teacher made sure the students were learning something new throughout the lesson. Her knowledge of the students' strengths and weaknesses, very clever questioning and good knowledge of mathematics ensured students understood exactly what they were doing. Excellent planning and preparation, resulting in all students using computers to try out what they had learned, ensured that all achieved as well as they possibly could. The very good pace, high expectations and the electric atmosphere of the lesson made it worth replicating.

154. Teachers plan lessons very well and they use computers very effectively to help students understand their work. All of these positive qualities result in the very good achievement.
155. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There are very good links between work in Year 10 and Year 11 and the courses taken in Year 12. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. Early entry to AS courses has proved very successful with high standards maintained. The quality of teaching in GCSE retake classes needs greater consistency to ensure higher standards overall. There is a lack of provision in the sixth form for non-specialist mathematics students to improve the mathematical skills that are needed in other subjects.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

156. Provision for mathematics in the sixth form needs improving. There is good use of mathematics in a few subjects, for example in science, geography and history but there is a lack of opportunity for all non-specialist mathematics students to improve their maths' skills.

## SCIENCE

### The focus was on biology but physics, chemistry and psychology were also sampled.

In **physics**, all candidates attained a pass grade, over half at the higher grades in 2002. These results are **above all schools nationally**. **Chemistry** results in the same year were **well above** national results with two-thirds of students attaining higher grades. **Teaching was very good** in both the Year 13 physics and the Year 12 chemistry lessons. Students learned well because they

were constantly challenged to think at high levels. One lesson of **psychology** was observed. Year 12 students were reaching **average standards** at this early stage of the course. Teaching was good, evidenced by thorough planning, strong subject knowledge and close attention to the learning needs of individual students.

## **Biology**

Provision in biology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses:**

- A-level results are consistently above the national average.
- Teaching is good and lessons are well structured with different activities designed to help students learn and improve their understanding.
- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, which allows them to present the subject in different, interesting ways.
- The relationships between the staff and students are very good.
- Students are sometimes given too few opportunities to work on their own and develop independence as learners.

### **Commentary**

157. In the years up to 2002, A-level biology results have consistently been well above national results and better than those in other subjects in the school. In 2002 a third of students taking AS level attained higher grades.
158. The subject is increasingly popular. Most students start the course having attained higher grades in GCSE double award science, and all complete the AS course. In 2002, all students achieved in line with or above expectation at A-level. Girls achieved less well than boys in AS. In 2003 results fell, as most students failed to achieve their predicted grade at AS owing to lengthy staff absence through the year. Currently, standards are above average and students are achieving well.
159. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge allows them to use a variety of methods to stimulate and interest students, so good learning ensues. In the best lessons, teachers use many different activities such as practical work and student-led presentations that produce very good learning. Students are challenged to think about what they are learning because of good quality general and examination-related questioning, based on the topic being studied. Because teachers occasionally talk too lengthily, students have too few opportunities in a lesson to develop independence as learners. A fieldwork course in North Wales at the end of Year 12 is very important because it develops well students' skills in recording data about different habitats. Data are then used in lessons, for example, to develop students' mathematical skills by calculations of the diversity of organisms in a habitat.
160. All students apply themselves well to work and relationships are very good. Files are generally well kept and organised with the students' completed work and notes. Often, examination questions are used effectively within lessons or set as homework to prepare students for examinations. Teachers keep detailed records of students' attainment and use these very carefully to track progress; this is very effective in raising standards.
161. The subject is well co-ordinated by the head of biology who has a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses and where improvements can be made. There are satisfactory improvements since the previous inspection.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Four ICT lessons were sampled. **Standards are below average** but this reflects the standards of attainment of the group on entry into the sixth form. Teaching is good overall. Strengths in teaching include subject knowledge, very good assessment methods and very good support and monitoring of students' work. This helps them to better understand how hardware and software can be used to solve business problems. However, the passive response of some students slows their learning.

### Information and communication technology across the curriculum

Provision is good and is much better than at the time of the previous inspection. Students' competence in using ICT is good. They use it well to improve presentations and to research work. The very well managed library is a well-used and rich addition to the ICT resources. However, better provision has increased demand and access to ICT is sometimes difficult. An absence of suitable computers in certain departments, art for example, also means that the range of work is curtailed.

## HUMANITIES

**The focus of the inspection was on geography and religious studies**, but history was also sampled. **Results in history are well above average**. In the lessons observed, teaching and learning were very good and standards were above average. Teaching focused very effectively on the historical skills of essay writing and interpreting sources. One Year 12 group was too large for teachers to ensure active participation by every student.

### Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Very good teaching leads to very good depth of learning and high attainment.
- Very good examination preparation occurs.
- A very good learning atmosphere arises because of the very positive working relationships between teachers and students.

### Commentary

162. In the 2002 A-Level examination, all students reached at least a pass grade and results overall were well above the national average. Improved results in 2003 represents excellent achievement by the students with almost all of them attaining much higher standards than predicted by their prior attainment. Recruitment to the course and retention are good.
163. Students set high standards for themselves and the standard of work seen in Years 12 and 13 is well above average. Students' very good attitudes to their studies help them to achieve very well, for example in building up detailed portfolios of work that include significant amounts of personal research. They demonstrate a very good breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, when, for example, evaluating factors measuring development and when using ICT very competently to design fieldwork questionnaires. The standard of geography A-Level coursework is high overall; students demonstrate very good fieldwork techniques and sophisticated data analysis.
164. Students' very good achievement is the result of very good teaching. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are fully informed of the demands of the examination.

Lessons are well planned and very good learning occurs. Teachers cover topics in substantial depth and have very effective means of helping most students plan and write essays to the required standard. However, lower attaining students would benefit from even more structured planning sheets. Homework is used productively to extend students' learning and to prepare for in-class discussions. Teachers use assessment well. Students are encouraged to set challenging targets for themselves and the teachers' evaluative comments on written work are helpful and detailed. Students value the support they receive from their teachers and find them easy to approach.

165. Very good, strong leadership has welded the department into a cohesive team committed to the maintenance of high standards. Clear guidance ensures consistency, particularly in examination preparation and in assessment procedures. There is effective monitoring of all aspects of the subject's performance and there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **Religious Studies**

Provision for Religious Studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses:**

- Excellent teacher subject knowledge and communication skills result in very good learning.
- High levels of challenge and expectation mean students achieve well.
- Students' very positive attitudes make a significant impact on learning.
- Large groups are not ideal for most effective teaching at this level.

### **Commentary**

166. Owing to problems with course options, recent examination results have been below average. This has since been rectified. Recruitment into the sixth form has been good with at present twenty-seven students doing AS Level.
167. Present standards indicate attainment in Years 12 and 13 to be above average. Students now achieve well as a result of very good teaching. Year 12 students are able to use philosophical terms with growing confidence and apply them with a good degree of rigour and understanding. Secure extended writing skills let pupils write and argue cogently taking full account of contrasting points of view. Year 13 students can analyse critically and logical thinking skills are well developed. Misunderstanding of religious terminology, for example, theodicy and deism still occurs, but pupils generally are secure in their understanding of key ideas and philosophical positions.
168. Teaching is very good; it challenges students to make considerable intellectual effort and develops their logical thinking, so they learn very well. Very good questioning often pushes students' thinking further and deeper than intended and makes them major contributors to their own learning. Assessment of progress is very good because it targets the students' learning needs. The marking of assignments is very effective because it shows students how they can improve. The response of students to these high expectations is both positive and pro-active. All students achieve well because they are interested and stimulated both by the subject and a desire to succeed. The large group numbers, however, make effective individual monitoring difficult especially in marking written work regularly, frequently and in the time available.
169. The department is managed very well; very clear vision and direction is provided. The subject is growing in popularity and standards are rising, continuing the good improvement found in the previous inspection.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

**The focus of the inspection was design and technology. Health and Social Care was also sampled.** The provision of an AS and A-level design course, together with an AVCE course in health and social care, provides a good continuing experience post GCSE. The courses are popular and received well by students. Numbers have increased in recent years. Three **health and social care** lessons were sampled, one in Year 12 and two in Year 13. Standards of attainment are above average and students' **achievement is very good**. Students show a good understanding of health and social care concepts and terminology and are able to learn independently using ICT efficiently. Their portfolios are thorough and well presented. Teaching was good overall and teachers related theory and practice of health and social care very effectively, enabling good learning to take place.

### Design and technology

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-level examinations are above average.
- Achievement over recent years has been good.
- Teachers work effectively as teams in AS and A-level courses.
- Strong leadership has promoted and consolidated academic success.
- Computers are not used selectively enough in the design process.

### Commentary

170. In the most recent year, students taking the A-level design course obtained results that compared favourably with results nationally and with results generally within the school. Current standards are above average. Achievement is good. Designing is imaginative and students show good practical skills in working with metal and other resistant materials; they achieve well. Very well presented project folders illustrate the design and realisation process. A comparative weakness here, however, is the standard of drawing, which does not reach the standard of practical 'making' skills. An over-reliance on computers in developing design ideas limits the development of drawing skills and, in many cases, is uneconomical in the use of time. Nonetheless, the students' very effective use of ICT improves their learning substantially.
171. Teaching and learning are good. They are the central pillars from which the students' good achievement stems. In design, good use is made of collaborative team teaching, particularly with the large AS class. Students are given good individual help and guidance from a base of good teacher subject expertise. Profitable use is made of a good style of questioning that encourages discussion. Work is well planned to motivate students.
172. Students' attitudes are very good; they are very responsive and their behaviour is excellent. The conduct of students has a very positive impact on their learning, which is purposeful and continuous. Recruitment and retention are good.
173. Subject leadership in both design and technology and health and social care is good. There is a very high level of commitment in both areas within this well managed department. New appointments have had a strong influence upon the development of these subjects. Improvements since the previous inspection are very good.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA



## Art and Design

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well during their time in the sixth form.
- Teachers' very good command of their subject shows in the high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice.
- Students' attitudes are very good; they are well motivated and learn very well independently.
- A lack of good accessible ICT resources limits the range of work.
- Target setting is underdeveloped.

### Commentary

174. A-level results in 2002 were above average. Achievement was good in relation to the students' standards when they began the course. The high standards were maintained in 2003.
175. Achievement in Year 13 is very good because of the students' good independent decision making skills. In lessons students learn very well: their standards are above average. Their often adventurous work is grounded on purposeful preparatory studies. Students work with a good degree of individuality and show in-depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. For example, work researching futurism and cubism from original sources to express the dynamism between music and movement produced very good sculptures. Studies on the influence of cultures and traditions on artists show students' sound investigation of images and texts.
176. Achievement is good in Year 12. Students work successfully in new areas and rise well to the challenge of individual study and interpretation. The students' portfolios demonstrate a growing ability to interpret and convey ideas and to use analytical and documenting skills. Students modelled their work well on contemporary artists, such as Lucian Freud, applying his techniques innovatively to their own work.
177. Teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. The teachers have a very good command of the specialisms they teach. A major strength is the emphasis on independent thought and learning and the high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice plays an important role in developing these and raising standards. Students are looked on as artists and individual needs are well identified; this enables students from differing backgrounds to make equally good progress. Good systems of assessment involve students taking personal responsibility for their learning, but the teachers do not record targets arising from the high quality evaluative lesson dialogue, so it is hard to measure progress arising from them.
178. Students' very good attitudes mean they work very well independently and enjoy art. Sketchbooks reflect a high level of personal commitment with evidence of research from visits to galleries and places of interest. The teachers' enthusiasm encourages students to be receptive to new ideas and beliefs other than their own. They are confident artists and significant numbers continue to study art in higher education. However, a lack of direct access to ICT limits the students' facility to use it to develop and extend their work.
179. The small department is well led and managed; and improvements since the previous inspection are good. There is a strong, shared commitment to improve. Learning is strongly reinforced by projects such as life drawing workshops, which are a significant factor in raising achievement. Recruitment and retention are good.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

### **Physical Education and Sports Studies**

Provision in physical education and sports studies is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- In 2002 standards were well above average in the A-level examinations.
- Students achieve very well because of very good teachers' subject knowledge.
- Students' attitudes to their work are excellent.
- Relationships between teachers and their students are excellent.
- An enrichment programme is offered to Year 12 students but not all are able to take part.

#### **Commentary**

180. Results in the A-level examination in 2002 were well above average with a high proportion of students achieving the higher A-B grades. There has been an improvement in 2003. In the lessons observed standards were above average, as was course work. Students take pride in their work and above-average grades are predicted for a number of students at the end of their present course.
181. Students demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding in the psychological aspects of performance in sport and energy systems in anatomy and physiology. They compare and understand well the sports and recreation arrangements of those in American high schools with those of the United Kingdom. Students achieve very well. This occurs because of very good teaching and a high level of subject knowledge that teachers possess. Lessons are very well prepared; expectations and challenge excellent and they go along at a very good pace. Insistence on good behaviour is excellent. Students appreciate this and respect their teachers' authority and expertise. There are excellent relationships between students and their teachers and this is a strength of the department. The students work excellently both on their own and together, so achieving very well. Recruitment and retention are very good.
182. Leadership and management of the department are of very good quality. The department's measures to check how well it is doing are very good. The school provides a satisfactory enrichment programme for students in Year 12 but not all are able to attend because of other course commitments; attendance is perforce erratic. Improvements since the previous inspection are very good.

### **Business Studies**

One lesson of business studies was sampled. Examination results are well above average and achievement in the lesson was very good. Teaching was very good. Strengths included subject knowledge, assessment, planning, monitoring and support and the range of activities provided, which combined to stimulate and motivate students. They developed a thorough understanding of product promotion.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

One general studies lesson was sampled. Results in A-level general studies were below average in 2002, but very nearly all students in the year sat the examination, a much higher than average proportion. Provision meets the requirements for religious education. The quality of teaching and learning was good. The students discussed well in groups, passing the initiative from one to the

other very well, although a few found it hard to sustain an argument. The lesson made a good contribution to citizenship, understanding the nature of argument.

One key skills lesson was observed. This was only the second lesson and a significant proportion of the lesson was taken in organising two groups. Insufficient work was seen to judge standards, though teaching was sound.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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