

# INSPECTION REPORT

## WOOTTON UPPER SCHOOL

Wootton, Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109710

Headteacher: Mr A R Withell

Lead inspector: Mrs M J Kerry

Dates of inspection: 1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> March 2004

Inspection number: 259309

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	13 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,220
School address:	Hall End Road Wootton Bedford Bedfordshire
Postcode:	MK43 9HT
Telephone number:	(01234) 767 123
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Warwick
Date of previous inspection:	16 <sup>th</sup> March 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Wootton Upper School is a mixed 13 - 18 Foundation Specialist Performing Arts College. The school is larger than average, with a large sixth form. The majority of students from Year 11 progress into the sixth form and some enter from outside. The sixth form is part of a consortium, but most provision for students is made on site. The school is oversubscribed. The school has a comprehensive intake. When they enter the school, students' attainment is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average, but the proportion of students with statements of special educational need is average. The proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is higher than that found in most schools. None are at the early stages of English language acquisition and most are members of established local ethnic communities and are fluent English speakers. Students come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. The majority (90 per cent) are white. The largest group within the school is students of Indian heritage (four per cent) and there are small numbers of students from most other ethnic groups. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has been awarded Artsmark, Beacon status and the Investors in People Award. Students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Young Enterprise and Careers in Action. There are strong links with the local cluster of schools and the school is part of an independent-state school partnership.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
9931	Mrs M J Kerry	Lead inspector	
9052	Mrs H Barter	Lay inspector	
2739	Mr I Benson	Team inspector	Religious education Psychology
30545	Mr D Castell	Team inspector	Geography Citizenship
1340	Mr D Wigley	Team inspector	Music
12721	Mr D Riddle	Team inspector	Design and technology
12844	Mr M Saunders	Team inspector	English
1995	Dr K Seager	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages German post-16
15590	Mrs S Slocombe	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs
18281	Mr D Webster	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
19152	Mr R Merryfield	Team inspector	History
23268	Dr K Corrigan	Team inspector	Business education
31685	Ms V Girling	Team inspector	Art
3353	Ms A Fenton	Team inspector	Drama
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Health and social care
30743	Mr N Cowell	Team inspector	Leisure and recreation
6044	Mr R Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics
27585	Mr K Hounslow	Team inspector	Science Biology post-16

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is an effective school which gives its students a good quality of education.** Standards in the main school are good and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good. There is clear leadership and effective management. In the sixth form students achieve well and reach above average standards. **The school gives good value for money.**

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

- The quality of leadership, including that of the headteacher and governing body, is very good.
- Leaders and managers are committed to providing a high quality education and are effective in raising standards, although some departmental review is not as sharply evaluative as it needs to be.
- The quality of teaching is good and students achieve well throughout the school; the achievement of students who have special educational needs is very good.
- The curriculum is of very good quality and gives students a very wide range of learning opportunities, including vocational courses, although some deployment of staff impacts adversely on quality and standards.
- The school's performing arts status is used very well to benefit all students and very high standards are achieved in these subject areas.
- Students are highly committed to their studies and contribute fully to the life of the school.
- The support and guidance that students receive is very good.
- The sixth form offers a very good quality of education.

Since the last inspection the school has made good progress. Standards in the main school have improved and good standards have been maintained in the sixth form. The high quality of teaching has been maintained. Weaknesses in strategic management and in governance have been very successfully addressed. The provision for students who have special educational needs has been much improved. The school has acquired performing arts college status and significantly improved some areas of its accommodation.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

**Students reach good standards and achieve well.** At the end of Year 9 overall standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average and students are doing very well when compared with those in similar schools. Achievement is satisfactory or good, except in art where it is unsatisfactory and English, science, dance and German where it is very good. Standards are rising in line with the national trend. At the end of Year 11 standards in examinations are well above average and students are again achieving very well compared with those in similar schools. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve as well as their peers. Achievement is very good in science, dance, drama, geography, German and religious education, good in English, mathematics, business education, design and technology, history, music and physical education, satisfactory in French and unsatisfactory in art. Results in GCSE examinations have been improving slowly and there was a significant improvement in 2003.

In the sixth form students make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. The fluctuations in A-level results reflect differences in the students entering the sixth form from year to

year, rather than falls in performance. Achievement is very good in drama, history, music and psychology: it is good in English, biology, information and communication technology, business education, design and technology, German and health and social care. Achievement is satisfactory in leisure and recreation, mathematics and art.

**Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good** and is well supported by the performing arts. Students have very good attitudes to their work and are very willing contributors to school life. Their attendance is good. Sixth form students give very good support to younger students. The ethos of the school is very good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided is good.** Teachers have very good command of their subjects and the enthusiasm to engage students in learning. **The quality of teaching is good and it is very good in the sixth form.** Students work hard and are committed to their studies. Their learning is good, and very good in the sixth form.

The quality of the curriculum is very good. It provides a very broad range of learning opportunities, including vocational courses. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good, and is outstanding in music and the performing arts. The support and guidance offered to students by the guidance department is very good. Highly effective induction in Year 9 helps students transfer successfully between schools and make good progress from the time they arrive. There is effective monitoring of progress and some outstanding work in tracking the progress of individual students. The partnership with parents is strong and there are very good relationships with the local community and partner schools, which support students' learning.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher provides very good leadership and uses the strengths of colleagues well through effective delegation. The practice of devolved leadership is working well. The leadership group is a cohesive team taking a clear lead in key areas of the school's work. Management is good. The governing body is well informed, plans very well strategically and works very effectively through a well co-ordinated committee structure. Some statutory requirements are not met.

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

Parents are well satisfied with the school. Students have a strong loyalty to their school and appreciate the opportunities it offers them. Because of this, they are willing to contribute to the school community through participating in events and activities, or through the year and school councils.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Ensure that departmental review is always sharply evaluative, especially where there is weaker practice in, for example, art and French.
- Ensure that the most effective use is made of staffing resources, including the deployment of non-specialist staff and the use of split groups, which both currently have an adverse impact on standards and quality in a minority of subjects.

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.
- Provide religious education in Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Report students' attainment in citizenship to parents.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT WOOTTON UPPER SCHOOL

The sixth form is larger than average and provides a wide range of GCE AS and A-level courses, AVCE courses and GNVQ courses at either foundation or intermediate levels. The school is part of a consortium but most provision is made on site.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a highly effective sixth form that provides a very cost-effective and high quality education.** All of the students benefit from a very broad curriculum that is complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Very good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well and to reach standards that are above the national average. The sixth form is very well led and effectively managed.

#### The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good quality teaching and learning enables students to achieve well: standards are above average and, in some subjects, well above average.
- A very broad range of subjects, courses and enrichment activities ensures that the learning needs and aspirations of students are met, both within and beyond the school day.
- Students have very good attitudes to school and to their work: they enjoy highly productive relationships, with peers and their teachers and contribute significantly to, as well as benefit from, the life and work of the school.
- A clear vision of the educational direction and further development of the sixth form is provided by very good leadership and management.

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

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Good.</b> In <b>English</b> standards are above average; students are well taught and their achievement is good. <b>Good.</b> Standards in <b>German</b> are average. The good teaching students receive leads to good achievement.
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards are in line with the average. Satisfactory teaching enables students to achieve in line with their capabilities.
Science (biology)	<b>Very good.</b> Well above average standards are the result of very good teaching. Students achieve well.
Information and communication technology	<b>Good.</b> Standards in ICT are above average. Teaching is good and students achieve well.
Humanities	<b>Very good.</b> Standards in <b>history</b> are above average. Very good teaching enables students to achieve highly. <b>Good.</b> Standards in <b>psychology</b> are well above average. Good teaching helps students to achieve well.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Good.</b> In design and technology standards are above average. Students are well taught and achieve well.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good.</b> In <b>drama</b> standards are well above average. Very good teaching leads to high achievement. <b>Excellent.</b> Standards in <b>music</b> are high. Students are very well taught and achievement is very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards in leisure and recreation are average. Teaching is



travel	satisfactory and students' achievement is satisfactory.
Business	<b>Good.</b> Standards in business studies are average. Students are well taught and their achievement is good.
Health and social care	<b>Good.</b> In health and social care standards are average. Good teaching leads to satisfactory achievement, which is improving.

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

**All students benefit from very good advice, guidance and support throughout their time in the sixth form**, provided by tutors as well as specialist advisers. Preparation for application to higher education is well done, but those seeking other career routes are less well catered for in-house. The very effective review process ensures that each student's progress is carefully monitored within subjects and courses and that they are well supported academically throughout their time in the sixth form. Any student that is a cause for concern is helped through detailed monitoring, advice and support. In some instances parents or carers are also involved as part of the support network.

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

**This area of the school is very well led and effectively managed.** There is a clear educational direction for the development of the sixth form. The governing body and leadership group have provided a secure framework within which a wide range of provision is made to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The majority of applicants for places come from within the school, but a range of external students also benefit from the extensive provision of subjects and courses, as well as the opportunities provided by the school's performing arts college status.

The leadership and management within subjects and courses are good. In music leadership and management are excellent, while in biology, ICT, drama and history they are very good and in English, mathematics, business studies, design and technology, health and social care, German and psychology they are good. In leisure and recreation, leadership and management are satisfactory. The work of the sixth form is effectively monitored.

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

**The vast majority of students enjoy sixth form life and have a high regard for their school.** They are aware of the opportunities that have been provided to enable them to grow and be successful as learners and people. Many students feel that, as a result, they want to "put something back into the school". Overall, they make an extensive contribution to the wider life and work of the school. They work maturely with younger students, support them in lessons, become a reading partner, act as a "buddy" and take leadership roles in organising events.

All students in Years 12 and 13 value having easy access to a range of adults whose help and support they seek. However, there is also a strong ethos within the student body of care for each other. There are strong informal peer-support networks that operate across the sixth form, where help, guidance, advice and co-operative working help many to work through their own concerns and crises.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

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

Standards in the main school are **above average overall**. Students achieve well in Years 9 to 11. Standards are above average in the sixth form and well above average in some subjects. This represents good achievement from students' starting points. Overall achievement is good.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students reach good standards and their achievement is good throughout the school.
- In 2003, results at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 were well above average.
- The achievement of students who have special educational needs is very good because of the high quality arrangements made to support their learning.
- Standards in the main school have risen since the last inspection with particular improvement in GCSE results in 2003.
- Standards are particularly high in music, drama, dance and science.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in art in Years 9 to 11 and in aspects of French.
- Standards at post-16 have been maintained and students' achievement is good.

#### Commentary

1. Standards of attainment across the curriculum are good in the main school. Work seen during the inspection confirmed the picture of rising standards given by results. In 2003, when compared to schools with similar prior attainment, the school's performance was well above average at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.
2. The leadership group and heads of department are committed to raising standards and some innovative practice has been developed in order to achieve this. This is evaluated in detail in the leadership and management section. The effect of this work is that the progress of students can be effectively tracked and individual performance raised.
3. Students enter the school in Year 9 with above average attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In their first year in school they make good progress. At the end of Year 9 results are well above average. Standards in other subjects are generally lower on entry, but again students make good progress and reach standards at the end of Year 9 that are overall above average. Standards are rising in Year 9 in line with the national trend.
4. Achievement in Year 9 is good. It is very good in English, science, dance and German: good in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology (DT), music, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE): and satisfactory in French, geography and history. Achievement is unsatisfactory in art because the structure of the course does not promote the development of skills at a sufficiently rapid pace.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.0 (34.7)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.5 (36.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.9 (34.5)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 299 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

5. At the end of Year 11 results are well above average. There have been fluctuations and the trend has been upward but rising at a rate below that nationally. However, in 2003 a number of strategies already in place were strengthened in order to improve results. These included mentoring, increased contact with parents and helping students to manage examination pressure. There was a marked improvement in results. Progress data on the current Year 11 indicate that this improvement has been sustained.
6. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. It is very good in science, dance, drama, geography and German. In French achievement is just satisfactory and in art it is unsatisfactory. In both art and French, where there is underachievement it is related to unsatisfactory teaching. In mathematics, English, ICT, business education, DT, history, music, RE and PE achievement is good.
7. Particularly high standards are reached in science and in the performing arts of dance, drama and music. The school has used performing arts college status well to build on and enhance the strengths in the performing arts noted at the last inspection. Students have been enabled to reach high standards in these subjects. There has also been a beneficial effect on standards across the broader curriculum by improving students' confidence, assurance, ability to collaborate and self-esteem.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	62 (60)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	39.2 (37.6)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 297 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

8. Students with special educational needs make very good progress overall and achieve very well. Close liaison with the partner middle schools ensures that students' special educational needs are well known and documented so that any potential difficulties are resolved before entry to the upper school. Data from tests that students take shortly after admission to the school is analysed thoroughly and effectively identifies those who may have learning or other difficulties. Comprehensive procedures are put in place to assist such students. The support for students who have special educational needs includes good access to a number of clubs. Attendance at these gives good support in raising students' achievement and promoting their self-esteem and confidence.
9. Very comprehensive arrangements are in place to identify and meet the needs of gifted and talented students. They make good progress in most subjects with students in the sixth form making very good progress. Information and support from national organisations are used well with students participating in special projects which are designed to stimulate their interests and expand their knowledge and understanding. Most subject departments provide tasks and activities that are appropriate to the students' abilities and which extend them fully, but this practice is not yet included in all lessons. Leadership of the gifted and talented programme is very good with the teacher responsible providing extremely detailed advice and guidance to staff and students.
10. Students who have English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers. The performance of students from minority ethnic groups is monitored. There is no evidence of underperformance by these groups. The school's focus on tracking individual students supports these students effectively, as it does others.

11. The school sets itself challenging targets at each stage, including post-16, based on value added analysis. Performance usually comes close to and sometimes exceeds these targets. Performance against targets is satisfactory.

### Sixth form

12. The majority of pupils in Year 11 move on into the sixth form. There are specific entry requirements for courses and a fairly broad range of prior attainment. On some courses students' starting points are quite modest.
13. In 2003, results for GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 were above average overall. The table of results below covers a complex situation. Performance at GCE A level at grades A and B improved significantly from 2002, rising from 30.2 per cent to 37.9 per cent of students gaining these higher grades. The proportion of students gaining grades A to E at GCE A level also increased. Results at AS level declined and were below average, mainly because of disappointing results gained in general studies. The school has targeted this as an area for improvement. In 2001 and 2002, Year 13 results were overall well above average. These relatively minor fluctuations are due to differing entry profiles and not to any declining trend in performance. Following the last inspection, results did decline, but over the past four years A level results have shown steady improvement. Work seen during the inspection showed that standards are now above average overall, as they were at the last inspection and well above average in biology, drama, music, psychology and RE (A-level students).

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	84.8 (93.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	27.1 (26.6)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	276.3 (289.5)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 160 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

14. The achievement of sixth form students is good. The work they undertake is challenging and they achieve well across the very broad range of courses on offer. Of the 13 subjects inspected in detail achievement was very good in drama, history, psychology and music and good in English, biology, ICT, business education, DT and German. In leisure and recreation, health and social care and in mathematics, achievement was satisfactory. Art and French were not inspected in detail, but there was sufficient evidence to judge that achievement was satisfactory in art and unsatisfactory in French in Year 13. In art students were producing work of an above average standard.
15. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement in the standards that students achieve:
- Results at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 have improved from above average to well above average.
  - Good standards in the sixth form have been maintained.
  - The standards achieved by students with special educational needs have improved significantly.

### **Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Students have very good attitudes to school. Their behaviour is good. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Attendance is good.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' participate very well in all the activities provided by the school.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school.
- Students' personal development is very good.
- The provision for performing arts has a strong impact on students' personal development.
- Attendance is good both in the main school and in the sixth form.

## **Commentary**

16. Students have very good attitudes to their work and to school life. Most are well motivated and approach their lessons with enthusiasm and a desire to learn. This has a good impact on their learning and achievement. There are high levels of participation in the very wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs, rehearsals, performances and sports activities. Students take a positive view of the school and the opportunities it affords them, both in their learning and in the extensive extra-curricular activities on offer, particularly in the performing arts.
17. Students' behaviour is good and is well managed by most staff, although there are a few teachers who are less confident in managing behaviour. On some occasions, students say that they are annoyed by disruptions which waste time. Students behave well around the school and most are sensible, for example when moving around narrow corridors. Students come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. They are happy at school and get on well together. Most report that they have not encountered any bullying or racial harassment and the school is quick to act if there are any incidents.
18. Students with special educational needs form very good relationships with teachers and support staff. This gives them the confidence to seek assistance and work constructively, whether in their academic work, or socially. Sixth form and Year 11 students, as part of a programme to improve learning, give effective support to students with a range of special needs.
19. Students' personal development is very good. Very good care and support by staff and by sixth form mentors, supported by very good quality relationships, help students learn to be independent, to understand and help others and to play a part in the school community. They are keen to take responsibility and to make decisions about the running of the school through their year group and school councils. The school is a racially harmonious community. Opportunities for students to explore social, moral and cultural issues through the taught curriculum are very good. Examples include exploring the moral dilemmas faced by the central characters in Miller's 'The Crucible' in English, the social problems of immigrant workers in German and the cultural influences of Japan, West India and Bali in music. Students respond very well to these opportunities.
20. The performing arts make a very strong contribution to all areas of students' personal development. High quality performances in music, drama and dance demonstrate students' commitment to giving of their best and engender a pride in their school. Their social and cultural development is very well promoted through all aspects of rehearsal and performance. While the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, the wide-ranging opportunities for students to participate in the performing arts, including regular participation in assemblies, helps them to develop empathy and deeper awareness. This makes a very significant contribution to their spiritual development.

## **Attendance**

21. Students' attendance and punctuality are good. Attendance is above the national average and continues to improve because the school has very good monitoring and recording systems. The educational welfare officer supports the school very well when students' attendance is

giving cause for concern. The school is not complacent and sets itself targets for improvement, with a view to reducing the levels of unauthorised absence.

**Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.7	School data	0.6
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

**Exclusions**

22. The school makes sensible use of sanctions and exclusions are used as a last resort when other support has not worked. Exclusion levels are average for a school of this size.

**Ethnic background of pupils**

**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White - British	1073	50	4
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3	1	0

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

**Sixth form**

23. Students have highly positive attitudes to school and their studies. Attendance is good. Students respond well to the high expectations teachers have of them. The majority of sixth form students enjoy life in Years 12 and 13 and are aware of the significant opportunities that the school has provided for them to grow and be successful as both learners and people. They think well of the school and speak with pride of its success and achievements. Representatives of the sixth form council regularly meet members of the sixth form leadership team and, each term, the headteacher.
24. All students are actively involved in lessons and in the extra-curricular and enrichment programmes. They contribute unstintingly to working with younger students in lessons, tutor time, the daily breakfast club, as a reading partner for those that have special educational needs, or as a mentor for those in Year 9. Students are also widely involved in sporting and cultural events, library work, charity fundraising, Young Enterprise, and in managing events. Sixth form students are modest about their contribution to the wider life and work of the school. However, many feel the need to “put something back into the school” in recognition of what it has done for them. In both their response to their studies and in working with those in Years 9 to 11, sixth form students show great maturity.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education provided is **good**. Teaching is of good quality and is very good in the sixth form. Students learn well, supported by very good quality care and by good procedures for assessment. The curriculum is rich and broad, with very good opportunities in a wide range of subjects, including vocational studies. Extra-curricular provision is very good and is outstanding in music. The school is very inclusive; all students are valued and their views are listened to and, where appropriate, acted upon. The school's ethos is very good.

## Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good in Years 9 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Assessment is good in the main school and very good post-16.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- All groups of students in the main school engage actively with their learning and learn well.
- Students' learning is well supported by assessment which is good in the main school and very good post-16.
- The teaching in Year 9 is better than that in Years 10 and 11, giving students a good start when they enter the school.
- Teachers' command of their subjects is a significant strength.
- The teaching that is unsatisfactory is mainly in art and French.
- Teaching and learning in the sixth form are of very good quality.

### Commentary

25. The good quality teaching noted at the last inspection has been maintained, despite recent changes in staffing. Students learn effectively.

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 178 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (3%)	49 (27%)	73 (41%)	41 (23%)	9 (5%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

26. The quality of teaching is good in Years 9 to 11. One quarter of the teaching observed was very good or excellent and two thirds was good or better. Where there was unsatisfactory teaching, this was in mainly in art and French. Excellent teaching was seen in history and in English.
27. Teaching is strongest in Year 9 with a higher proportion which is good, very good or excellent and less unsatisfactory than is found in Years 10 and 11. This teaching, combined with very good induction procedures and close liaison with the middle schools, enables students to make good progress without any slowing down after their change of school. With option choices to be made and tests and assessments to be undertaken all within the first year at the school, this is a major strength underpinning students' good achievement.
28. Teaching continues to be good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have very good command of their subjects and usually manage behaviour well. Students are active and sparky and by no means compliant. Although there are instances when classes are not as well managed as they need to be, behaviour is usually well managed. This is achieved through active engagement of students with their learning which channels their energies constructively. Good use is made of assessment to support students' learning and to help them to improve.
29. Teaching and learning are very good in English, science, dance and music, good in mathematics, ICT, business education, drama, DT, geography, German, history, PE and RE. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in French and unsatisfactory in art. No teaching could be observed in the guidance programme which includes personal, social, health and citizenship education, as the timetabled period fell outside the inspection. Teaching was sampled in sociology, leisure and tourism and classical civilisation; in all the lessons observed, teaching and learning were good.

30. Staff from the special needs department work constructively with subject teachers and offer very good support to both individuals and groups of students, enabling them to engage fully in lessons. Support for the majority of students is provided in subject lessons, but some are rightly withdrawn to the special needs department for more intensive help. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides subject teachers with detailed information and guidance on strategies that are helpful in addressing students' needs. Teachers are well informed about students' achievements and progress because of the very effective monitoring and assessment records kept by the department. In most subjects the work is well matched to students' learning requirements. However, there are some lessons where this is not the case and students make less progress.

### **Sixth form**

31. In the sixth form teaching and learning are very good. Nearly two fifths of the teaching observed was very good or excellent and four fifths was good or better. In the subjects inspected in detail, some excellent teaching was seen in textiles, electronic products and German. Teaching and learning are very good in biology, drama, history, music and psychology. In English, ICT, DT, business education, German and health and social care, teaching and learning are good; in leisure and recreation and mathematics they are satisfactory.
32. A range of subjects across the curriculum was also sampled. The teaching observed was very good in dance, government and politics, physics and RE (Year 13): good teaching was seen in chemistry, RE (Year 12), art (Year 12) and geography. Satisfactory teaching was seen in art (Year 13) and in French (Year 12) and unsatisfactory teaching in French (Year 13).
33. The strengths of sixth form teaching are the pace and effective use of time, underpinned by the very good subject knowledge of the teachers. Students respond to this by applying themselves and working productively. Assignments are used well to promote students' independence and research skills. The quality of assessment is very good. Students' progress is effectively tracked and they receive good quality feedback on how to improve.

### **The curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum is very good. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. Accommodation and resources are good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The broad curriculum in the main school and post-16 takes account of the wide range of learning needs of students.
- The range of courses in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form prepare students very well for their next stage of learning, training or employment.
- The large and varied programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities complement the taught curriculum and extend students' opportunities for out-of-hours learning.
- The statutory requirements for RE in Year 11 and post-16 are not yet fully met.
- The deployment of staff in a minority of subjects has an impact on quality and standards.

### **Commentary**

34. The curriculum provides a very wide range of opportunities to meet the learning needs of all students. It is very well conceived and meticulously planned. A highly knowledgeable committee of governors monitors the implementation and effectiveness of the curriculum policy. However, statutory requirements for the provision of RE in Year 11 are not fully met.
35. Progression from middle to upper school is well managed through the strong links formed by the pastoral and curriculum teams. The curriculum takes good account of the prior learning of students and enables them to benefit, for the first time in some subjects, from demanding



specialist provision. All are taught dance and drama and higher attaining students are able to study a second foreign language.

36. In Years 10 and 11 the learning opportunities have recently broadened to provide a wider range of academic and vocational subjects and courses and routes other than GCSE to gain qualifications. A good programme of work-related college courses caters for those students seeking education and training in specific trades and skills. The guidance programme ensures that students are well advised about the subjects and courses most suited to their needs and aspirations. The planning for progression in learning from Year 9 into Years 10 and 11 and beyond is of very good quality and ensures a significant level of coherence for students' programmes of study.
37. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good. All students have full access to the curriculum. Very careful consideration is given, in conjunction with subject teachers, students and their parents, to providing learning opportunities that are best for the individual students and in which they can achieve as well as possible. For example, in Years 10 and 11 some students are provided with time for private study to improve their work in the core subjects. There is good provision for those who are gifted and talented.
38. The extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities have a high level of student participation. Currently, two-thirds of all students take part in at least one extra-curricular programme. Participation in the arts is outstanding. These opportunities help students to develop social and subject-specific skills as well as increasing confidence and raising their levels of self-esteem. After school activities are very well attended by students with special educational needs and provide further good opportunities for learning, enjoyment and social interaction.
39. There is a good match of teachers to the current curriculum. Teachers are very well qualified for the subjects they teach. In a small minority of cases some are deployed into other curriculum areas in which they have no background or experience. In the current year this strategy has resulted in some split classes and in a small number of students making insufficient progress. Technical and clerical assistants across the school are well deployed and teachers benefit from their hard work and commitment. Learning support assistants are very well deployed to provide students with high quality learning support.
40. The school's accommodation supports learning well. The buildings and grounds are manifestly well cared for and students respond positively to this. Attractive and educative display in a range of subjects enhances students' learning. In keeping with the school's specialist status, accommodation in music is outstanding. It is also of very high quality in the performing arts, but there is not enough of it. As a result, some Year 9 students do not benefit from it. There is a shortage of dedicated accommodation in science and mathematics and some undersized rooms in design and technology.
41. Resources are well deployed to support learning in the majority of subjects, with clear strengths in the support to learning given by the library and ICT. However access to computers is only satisfactory in mathematics, business and leisure and tourism and unsatisfactory in art and design.

### **Sixth form**

42. The curriculum for post-16 students is of very good quality, with a wide range of courses and routes to accreditation. While the majority of post-16 students progress from Year 11, an increasing number are applying for places from other schools. There is a traditional diet of GCE AS courses, with the opportunity in most cases to progress to GCE A-level. In addition there is a significant number of AVCE courses and GNVQ courses at either foundation or intermediate levels. Although the statutory requirement for RE is not fully met by the module included in the general studies course, a programme for the next academic year is being

planned. Very good provision is made for students who have special educational needs and for those identified as being gifted or talented.

43. The take-up in some subjects is very high. The current strategy, to respond to the course choices students make and meet their learning needs, is viable within the current teaching staff establishment. Sixth form group sizes are appropriate and cost effective. Great care is taken to ensure that students do select appropriate courses. Consequently, retention rates are high.
44. Post-16 teachers have very good subject knowledge. In most subjects, they are appropriately deployed and have opportunities to share good practice. The teaching accommodation provides a very positive learning environment and courses are very well resourced. The library complements the departmental resources collections and provides a high quality service to support students' learning. Visits, fieldwork and other extra-curricular provision also complement students' learning.

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

The provision to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. They are provided with good quality support, advice and guidance. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The guidance department provides all students with very good care and support.
- Provision for health and safety is satisfactory although risk assessments are overdue in some departments.
- Students have very good and trusting relationships with staff and are well supported by sixth formers.
- Students with special educational needs are supported very well.
- There are very good induction arrangements for students who are new to the school in Year 9.

### **Commentary**

45. Students are provided with very good pastoral support through the work of the guidance department. The area is led and managed very well. Heads of year, their assistants and tutors know the students very well, monitor their behaviour, attendance and progress effectively and provide very good continuity of care and support for students. There is very good awareness of child protection procedures and those relating to children in public care. The school is very well supported by the educational welfare officer when it has concerns about individual students. This very good support has a significant impact on students' achievement.
46. Students have very good relationships with staff. They feel valued and have confidence that the school listens to their concerns, either individually or through the class and school councils. They know that members of the guidance department are available to them if they wish to speak to an adult. Students in Year 9 speak very positively about their sixth form mentors who help them with their work and are there to speak to if they have any worries. Teachers provide students with good quality advice and guidance in lessons. The school is making good progress in developing target setting based on very good academic progress data. Students are helped to understand areas for improvement in their work and what they need to do to achieve this.
47. The co-ordinator for special educational needs manages the process for the identification and assessment of individual students' needs very effectively. Records are comprehensive and information accessible to all staff. Communication between departments is very good. Statutory requirements are met fully and most parents attend the annual reviews of statemented students. Parents are encouraged to discuss the strengths of and areas for

improvement in, the school's provision for their child. A number of external services give good advice and assistance to the school, students and parents. Well-trained support staff provide very effective help and guidance, whether it is in subject lessons or in the special needs department. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are detailed and helpful in focussing on areas for improvement in students' work and behaviour.

48. Students who are new to the school in Year 9 settle into school life quickly because they are very well supported. The school has strong links with middle schools. Close liaison with middle school staff means that there are well-formulated plans for any special support before students arrive. Year 9 students speak highly of the induction days which they say helped them to feel part of the school even before they started. All students have good access to well organised and impartial guidance on career and work opportunities through the guidance department.
49. While the school cares very well for its pupils and has satisfactory arrangements for their health and safety, risk assessments in some departments have not recently been kept up to date. Some concerns were identified during the inspection and suitable action was taken.

### **Sixth form**

50. Very good quality care, guidance and support is provided for all sixth form students. Right from the time they apply for a place, students are offered clear guidance about expectations and the range of courses available. As they progress through Years 12 and 13, students' future aspirations are dealt with through specialist advice. The approach to preparation for application to higher education is thorough, although those seeking other career paths, through for example the theatre, arts or the armed forces are less well advised in-house.
51. Regular progress reviews make strategic use of assessment and other data. Students' progress is carefully monitored within subjects and courses. Any causes for concern are monitored assiduously and, if necessary, discussions with the student and parents or carers are instigated. This helpful partnership, between school and home, provides additional support as each student works through their difficulties. The progress review cycle ensures that students are well supported at all stages of their passage through the sixth form.
52. There is a strong network of peer support that operates across Years 12 and 13. These informal arrangements often lead to students sharing concerns, sorting out problems and benefiting from the experience of others of their own age. Because of this strong peer support, students do not always feel the need to turn to adults. Students' views are listened to, taken seriously and, where at all possible, acted upon; this represents very good involvement.

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

There are good links with parents, who have positive views of the school. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. Very good use is made of the school's links with the community.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are pleased with most areas of the school's work.
- Communication with parents is good overall although the use of planners by tutors is inconsistent.
- The school has very good links with the community.
- The school works very well in partnership with other schools and colleges.

### **Commentary**

53. The school has good links with parents. Most are pleased with the education provided, particularly the support and guidance provided for students, including those with special

educational needs. They are delighted with the impact that the school's provision for performing arts has on students' confidence and achievement and inspection evidence fully supports this view. Parents have mixed views about the quality of information provided. Some are very positive about the easy communication with staff, for example by email, while others report difficulties in communicating regularly with tutors. The school recognises that this is an area that could be improved. Heads of year regularly monitor the use of planners by tutors, students and parents, but there is still some inconsistency in their use by all parties concerned.

54. The school's formal documentation is professionally presented and gives parents a very good view of the school's work. The school is currently reviewing the way in which it communicates students' progress to parents and is considering ways to improve the quality of its academic mentoring so that parents and students are better informed. Regular grade sheets provide parents with clear indications of students' attainment and targets. However, written information in reports is not always subject specific and too often focuses on attitudes rather than the academic progress made. Reports do not meet statutory requirements in every respect because there is no reporting of students' progress in citizenship.
55. The school makes very good use of its community links and partnerships with other schools and colleges. These enrich the curriculum for students, provide staff with good opportunities to share and develop expertise and raise the school's status in the community. The school is proactive in developing these links, such as the Independent Schools Partnership, to provide students with a wide range of interesting learning experiences. Links with middle and partner schools are particularly strong and there are many very good opportunities for students, pupils and staff to work together. The special educational needs co-ordinator works closely with schools in the area, meeting regularly to discuss issues concerning special needs and liaising closely with feeder schools. This enables arrangements for students' transfer to the school to be well thought out and effectively implemented. New students settle into the school's routines confident that their needs are known and understood.
56. There are good links with businesses and colleges for work-based learning and to extend the scope of vocational education for students and sixth formers. The performing arts play a central role in widening the school's links both locally, nationally and abroad and serve to enhance the school's very good reputation. The school is not complacent and continues to seek ways to develop its role and facilities so that it is at the heart of the local community.

### **Sixth form**

57. The home-school partnership is as strong and effective in the sixth form as it is in the main school. Parents and carers are very supportive of the work of the sixth form and are fully involved in any discussions concerning the progress and future aspirations of their children. There are also strong links with the local and wider community. Many sixth form students work with partner middle school pupils on joint music and drama productions or visit these schools for performances or concerts. The effectiveness of learning in, for instance, general studies and the guidance programmes, are enhanced by contributions from speakers and advisers external to the school and by strong links with partner upper schools and local universities.
58. The range of subjects and courses available to students is extended by having access to a consortium upper schools for courses not available within their own sixth form. Those studying German in Year 13 take advantage of such arrangements.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are **very good**. Leadership, including that of the headteacher, is very good. Management is good. The quality of governance is very good.

There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in that a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all students, religious education is not provided in Year 11 and the sixth form and attainment in citizenship is not reported to parents.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher has a clear educational vision and the ability to use the strengths of colleagues through well-planned delegation.
- The leadership group is coherently organised and cohesive; it is an effective team giving very good leadership in key areas of the school's work.
- The governing body is highly effective and has made very significant improvements in strategic planning since the last inspection.
- Middle managers give very good leadership; the concept of devolved leadership is working well.
- The quality of management is good, but there are some aspects of staff deployment that need attention.
- There is some outstanding work in tracking students' progress.
- Departmental review is well established but is not always sufficiently evaluative.

### **Commentary**

59. The headteacher and leadership group have a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to providing a high quality education for students. This is communicated to and embraced by, the wider staff of the school. The leadership group provide a very effective steer in major areas of the school's work, but there is also a strong sense of corporate responsibility amongst staff. The school's policy of continuously devolving responsibility and empowering those within departments is working well, although it is not by any means fully implemented.
60. The governing body is very effective. Its committee structure is well planned and extremely well co-ordinated so that governors' time is well used. The governing body has responded in a very thorough way to the issues of strategic planning raised in the last report. The quality of planning is now very good. There is a good relationship between the governing body and senior managers, with well organised linking between the governors' committees and members of the leadership group. The governing body has been very influential in shaping the work of the school and receives reports that inform governors of key indicators concerning the school's performance.
61. The management of the school is effective. The recent high turnover of staff has been managed well and the good quality of teaching noted at the last inspection has been maintained. Some issues concerning the deployment of staff remain unresolved and these are having an impact on standards in some subject areas. The school was already undertaking a review of the curriculum and staffing at the time of the inspection and this is rightly judged a priority.
62. Some of the school's practice is innovative. There is some outstanding work in the tracking of student progress, as outlined in the cameo below. Recent developments in departmental review have linked the management of performance and review of the quality of teaching and learning in a single well designed process. There has been a continuous devolving of responsibility for self-evaluation to heads of department and this most recent development is a further step in this process. The quality of departmental self-evaluation and review is generally good and the process is well established in the school, but some departments are not making sufficiently focused and sharp evaluations of their work. At whole school level, the analysis undertaken to produce the school's self-evaluation form (S4) resulted in an extremely accurate reflection of the school's effectiveness.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### **An outstanding system for tracking student progress allows teachers to identify potential underachievement of individuals or groups.**

A system has been developed by an assistant headteacher to track individual progress, predict future performance and identify potential underachievement at an early stage. The benchmarks used incorporate not only a range of national predictors, but also a predictor based on the school's own subject performance. This means that teachers can see how a student ought to be performing relative to both national data and the school's own data. Thus, if a school department is especially high performing, targets are set which are challenging, based on the past performance of that subject in the school. Conversely, departments that have been struggling can set realistic targets for improvement, recognising where they have come from. This ability to tailor to particular circumstances is powerful motivationally as the data is seen to be school-specific and therefore to have meaning for teachers in the classroom. The system makes very good use of colour coding to make information accessible to teachers, is simple to operate, and allows teachers to look at the performance of their own teaching groups as well as individual students. It incorporates both statistics and professional judgement in a way that allows teachers to make intelligent use of the questions raised by the data.

63. Since the last inspection the school has successfully achieved performing arts college status. The school's costs are above average, partly because of the additional funding resulting from specialist college status, but also because, as an upper school, funding levels are higher than in a typical 11-18 school. Very good use has been made of the funds provided as a result of performing arts status. Students are enabled to achieve high standards in these areas of the curriculum and there is also a wider impact on their confidence and self-esteem. Despite high costs, the school gives good value for money.

### Financial information

#### *Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,582,000	Balance from previous year	399,000**
Total expenditure	4,881,000*	Balance carried forward to the next	100,000
Expenditure per pupil	4,000*		

\* Includes capital expenditure related to performing arts college status.

\*\* Includes capital brought forward relating to delayed building works.

### Sixth form

64. The sixth form has very effective leadership. The governing body and leadership group have a shared sense of purpose and a clear educational vision for the further development of the sixth form. They provide a robust framework within which provision is made to meet the learning needs of all students. The management of this area of the school's work is effective. The work of the sixth form is monitored at a variety of levels to ensure that the vision is being translated into a reality for all its students. The leadership team is strategic in its planning and is active and responsive to the needs and concerns of students.
65. Within courses and curriculum areas, students benefit from very good quality teaching and leadership and management are good overall, with much that is very good and some which is outstanding. Sixth form provision is very cost-effective.
66. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection - especially in the range of provision made to meet the learning needs of a much wider spectrum of post-16 students. The extensive enrichment programme and the school's performing arts college status enhance the experience now provided for sixth form students.

## Statutory requirements

67. A daily act of collective worship is not provided for all students due to the lack of a large space and the wish of some staff not to lead such an occasion. Each year group has one assembly per week led by the headteacher or senior members of staff. Those assemblies observed during inspection promoted spiritual, moral and cultural development well, dealing with significant themes and allowing students some time to reflect on them. These assemblies broadly met statutory requirements and offered students a good quality experience. This was not generally the case with thoughts or themes explored during tutor time when students were not due to attend assembly.
68. The school actively seeks to develop students' spirituality through the curriculum and especially through the performing arts. It is successful in this and students' spiritual development is very good, with music, drama and dance making particularly strong contributions. Students also attend a service in the local church on important festivals such as Christmas. Although not fully compliant, the governing body is working towards meeting the requirements and is ensuring that students' spiritual development is properly promoted. The governors keep the situation under review.
69. There is no provision for religious education in the sixth form, although there are plans in place to introduce conferences which would meet requirements, supplementing the general studies programme. There is no religious education in Year 11, but all students take a GCSE short course in religious education in Year 10. Again, although not fully compliant, the governing body is ensuring that students' achievement in religious education is at least satisfactory by the end of the key stage.
70. The reporting of attainment in citizenship to parents is planned for reports later this year.
71. The governors and headteacher should continue their efforts to meet statutory requirements in full.

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

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

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

- Teachers' very strong subject knowledge is used effectively to support students' learning.
- The majority of lessons have pace, purpose and variety so that students are interested and make good progress.
- Teachers have high expectations of students' work and behaviour so that lessons are orderly and productive.
- Opportunities for active and independent learning are not always provided.
- There is insufficient curriculum time for English in Years 10 and 11.
- Marking and target setting is not of consistently high quality.

#### **Commentary**

72. Students' attainment in English when they enter the school is above average. Results in tests taken in 2003 at the end of Year 9 were well above average. Results in GCSE language and literature examinations were also well above average compared to similar schools. Over Years 9 to 11 therefore, students make good progress and achieve well. This is particularly so for boys. Standards seen during the inspection confirmed the good picture given by these results.
73. Students achieve well in lessons in response to teaching which is generally well planned, lively and alert to the particular needs of individuals. Setting arrangements allow for work to be appropriately pitched. Students with special educational needs make good progress. The good focus on literacy is another supporting element in students' overall good achievement.
74. Schemes of work for Year 9 are detailed and well resourced and the department is now bringing planning for Years 10 and 11 up to an equivalent high standard. Lessons are usually lively and purposeful so that students show interest and make good progress. Students' writing develops in range and assurance over time. This is true for students of all abilities. Marking is encouraging and regular, but not all teachers give sufficiently precise targets for improvement. ICT is used regularly to draft and edit written work and promotes high standards of presentation.
75. Teaching observed was consistently very good in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11 it was very good overall, but with variations from satisfactory to outstanding. These variations have an effect on students' achievement. Where there was insistent pace and purpose and a requirement for students to discuss, reflect and present their thoughts to others in developed ways, (as in very effective lessons on Macbeth and The Crucible), progress was clearly accelerated. These lessons demonstrated the very secure subject knowledge and high expectations of teachers, typical of much of the teaching across the department. Not all lessons required and developed students' active involvement however. Though never less than capably taught, students were sometimes too passive. Although they listened and learned, they did not have full opportunity to show what they knew and could do.
76. The head of department provides good leadership. Her own work offers a very good model of high expectations and energetic, student-centred teaching. Effective planning promotes the



development of students' knowledge about language and literature. The English team is collaborative, principled and committed to the academic and pastoral support of their students. These are real strengths. Departmental self-evaluation is good, but lacks a supportively critical edge which would ensure that the best practice in marking, assessment and active learning becomes general.

77. Curriculum time is tight in Years 10 and 11. This limits opportunities to enhance achievement within lessons. This may be a partial explanation for the very good rates of progress in Year 9 not being fully carried forward into later years. There is very good extra-curricular provision, (revision classes, mock trials, public speaking, reading clubs) to promote students' interests and capabilities, but this does not satisfactorily compensate for the lack of lesson time to cover the requirements of two examination courses.
78. Results at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are on an upward trend. After a period of turbulence, staffing is settled and strong and a team ethos is being successfully developed. Access to ICT for students, (an issue at the last inspection) is now a consistent feature of English provision. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

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

79. Provision for literacy development was judged by the majority of subject inspectors to be good. In English, religious education and music, for example, rigorous but well-supported demands enabled students to speak, read and write with progressive sophistication and accuracy. In nearly every subject the influence of the National Literacy Strategy was clear and beneficial. This was seen particularly in students' extended writing, which was often wide ranging and assured. Because of these arrangements, students' standards of literacy are generally good. The newly appointed literacy co-ordinator has well formulated plans to advance good practice across the school but does not have sufficient time allocated to evaluate properly the impact of literacy work in departments.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

Provision in French is **satisfactory** and in German is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are skilled linguists.
- In 2003, German GCSE results were the highest in the school.
- Students achieve very well in German because teaching is good.
- Marking often does not give a clear indication of the quality of the work.
- French, German and Spanish are offered, but very few pupils retain two languages.
- There is some unsatisfactory teaching leading to some underachievement in French.

### **Commentary**

80. In Year 9, the proportion of students reaching National Curriculum Level 5 or above has risen over the last three years from about a third to nearly half. Girls consistently outperform boys. Current standards in French are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Achievement varies from good to unsatisfactory and is mostly linked to the quality of teaching. In the early weeks learning is slowed because of the wide variation in students' levels of competence when they arrive from middle schools. A few students who plan to drop French in Year 10 do not try hard enough. German is offered to upper sets in Year 9. Standards are above average overall, which represents very good achievement for one and a half terms of learning.

81. At GCSE in French, the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C has risen since the last inspection; it has fluctuated around the national average in the last five years. Girls do much better than boys, but boys achieve well in comparison with their other subjects. In German both boys and girls perform well above the national average, particularly the boys where the proportion of grades A\* to C is double the national average. For both boys and girls German is their best performing subject. In both languages a high proportion gain grades A\*/A.
82. Current standards in Year 11 are broadly average in French, being above average in higher sets but well below in lower sets. Achievement is satisfactory. Standards in German are above average and often well above average. Achievement is very good. Students with special educational needs and those of minority ethnic heritage achieve in line with others in their set.
83. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers are good linguists. In French, although much teaching is satisfactory and teaching is good in about a third of lessons, unsatisfactory teaching resulted in unsatisfactory learning and achievement in two lessons. Overall teaching in French is satisfactory. Unsatisfactory features of teaching are: slow pace, excessive use of English, poor explanation of the task so that students are unclear what to do and, in a small number of cases, class control which is not tight enough. Teaching and learning in German are good; they vary from good to excellent. Spanish teaching seen was good. Features of this good teaching are the extensive use of the foreign language by both teacher and students, good pace, time used to the full, good relationships and good use of humour. The teachers extend the students' language and consolidate it well so that the students use new structures confidently.
84. Much marking is regular and careful, but occasionally it is poor. The best marking provides clear guidance on what students need to do to improve. Much gives too little indication of the quality of the work. In classes taught by different teachers who use different mark schemes, students are unclear about how well they are progressing.
85. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The departmental review is sound. Data is well used to track departmental and students' progress. The review focuses insufficiently on raising achievement, monitoring teaching and marking and sharing good practice. The plentiful resources are well organised. Students in all years and of all languages benefit from a modern textbook that they can take home, regular small group work with languages assistants, access to very good material on the languages intranet and individual language practice using the language laboratory. Good accommodation is enhanced by very good display.
86. Numbers studying a language in Year 10 this year dropped by over a third and those studying two languages fell from 85 in Year 9 to five in Year 10. This is a poor outcome for the curriculum time given to two languages. Learning is enriched through a Spanish club, additional Spanish lessons after school and a German exchange.
87. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. Results have improved, a good Year 9 reading scheme has been introduced and there are now lively learning experiences with an interactive whiteboard but there is an increased amount of unsatisfactory teaching.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations are above average and improving.
- GCSE mathematics results are slightly below those achieved by students in their other subjects.

- Teaching and learning are good overall so that students' achievement is good.
- The pace of parts of some lessons is too slow so that students lose interest and achieve too little.
- Leadership and management are effective, especially in implementing new ideas to enhance learning.
- The quality of marking of students' work is uneven.

### **Commentary**

88. Students' results in the 2003 tests at the end of Year 9 were above average. Their performance compares very favourably with students in similar schools, based on their prior attainment. GCSE mathematics results in 2003 were above average; better than in 2002 when results were in line with the national average. GCSE statistics results in 2003 were well above average. Students perform slightly less well in mathematics than in some other subjects but slightly better in statistics. Test and examination results are broadly confirmed by the standard of work seen in classes and students' work. Standards are above average in both key stages.
89. Students' achievement is good and corresponds to the overall good teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are very good in upper sets in Years 10 and 11, where teachers show a high level of subject expertise and employ investigative approaches to interest and challenge students. Students make very good headway in their appreciation of moving averages in Year 10 and of algebraic fractions in Year 11. Positive features of these and most other lessons, are teachers fully involving students in discussions and maintaining their interest and productivity. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and support staff appreciate where the students have difficulties and take appropriate action. For example, in Year 10 the teacher introduced multi-link blocks to improve students' understanding of how to construct various three-dimensional compound shapes. Weaknesses in parts of some lessons, that were otherwise satisfactory, are allowing the pace of part of a lesson to drift and tolerating students' reduced work rate on occasions when they are beginning to lose interest in the topic.
90. Leadership of the department is good. There is a positive sense of purpose aimed at raising students' achievement. Teachers work well together as a team, each having specific responsibility for an aspect of work. Many well-founded curricular innovations have been established to maximise students' learning. For example, sixth formers help Year 9 pupils on a regular basis, the introduction of GCSE statistics is a success and the separate boys' and girls' classes in Year 10 have alleviated some gender issues. Management of the department is also good. The recent departmental review highlights strengths and weaknesses accurately and is a helpful blueprint for future action. There is extensive monitoring of data on students' performance in tests and elsewhere, so that aspects of work where students have difficulty are pinpointed and tackled. The commitment to staff development is strong and support for new members of staff is very positive.
91. There has been good progress since the previous inspection. Students with special educational needs have good support in the classroom from teaching assistants and especially so from sixth form students. Extra-curricular provision is very good and includes a significant amount for more able students. For example, the department runs an after-school Year 9 Level 8 club, organises master classes and regularly participates in national and local challenge competitions. The introduction of the three-part lesson, with more practical activities, has helped lower attaining students make better progress. On some occasions though, parts of lessons remain too long drawn out so that students lose interest and momentum. The quality of marking of pupils' work is uneven with a lack of a discernible common approach or standard. The use of ICT is patchy, being limited by timetable constraints.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

92. Provision is satisfactory and standards are average overall. There has been training, an audit of provision and a cross-curricular working party to look at issues related to numeracy. In most subjects there is appropriate development of numeracy skills. For example, in Year 9 science more able students reach a high standard in interpreting speed-time graphs while lower ability students successfully calculate moments of forces. In design and technology students measure accurately, understand scale and use graphs to represent and interpret data. In geography students interpret Ordnance Survey maps, use co-ordinates and scale and determine population pyramids, whilst in history they analyse Reichstag election results. In art and modern foreign languages there is little provision and consequently standards are below average.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have been well above the national average for the last three years.
- Achievement of students at the end of Year 11 is well above what might be expected based on their attainment at the end of Year 9.
- Very good teaching leads to very good learning and achievement.
- There is very good leadership and effective management of the department.
- Students have insufficient opportunities to use data logging equipment.
- Reports to parents are unsatisfactory.

### Commentary

93. Over the three years up to and including 2003, average point scores have been above the national average. Results follow a similar pattern to those nationally. Pupils at the end of Year 9 achieve better results than might be expected based on their results when aged 11 in the middle school. GCSE results have been well above the national average for the last three years and well above what might be expected of these students based on their attainment at the end of Year 9. Standards of work seen together with the school's predictions for results this year suggest that achievement will again be well above expectations.
94. Overall the quality of teaching is very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection and the consistently high quality is a significant achievement in a department of this size. The main strengths in teaching include excellent subject knowledge, very high expectations and very good planning to use a wide range of resources and activities. Teachers deal with students who have low concentration levels in a firm but friendly manner. Students have good knowledge of the level/grade they are working at because teachers share test data with them. Students know what they need to do to improve. However the quality of the reports to parents is unsatisfactory. Teachers do not report sufficiently on students' strengths and weaknesses in the four areas of study.
95. Most students have above average literacy and numeracy skills, which help them to obtain the highest level/grades. Teachers improve students' literacy skills by a range of activities. For example, students read a short play about the plague of London when learning about diseases. They have well above the expected level of knowledge and understanding of the principles of fair testing, which they apply well in their investigative work. The provision for gifted and talented students is satisfactory. Mostly the department meets their needs by putting these students into the highest sets and matching the work to their ability. Students with special educational needs make very good progress because the teachers and support assistants work closely together. Students' standards in ICT are unsatisfactory. They have insufficient opportunities to use data logging equipment. The department has insufficient sensors and portable computers to fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in this particular aspect.

96. The head of department provides very good leadership and effective management of performance. A strong team of experienced teachers provide very good support for the work of the department. The newly qualified teachers receive excellent support and are already making a valuable contribution to the department's work. The technician team is efficient, supportive and makes an important contribution to the work of the department.
97. There is a very broad science curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11. Most follow the double award course, but there are also three separate sciences and an applied science course for those who would benefit from a more practical approach. This breadth of opportunities is very successful in allowing a wide range of learning needs to be met. Risks are identified in the schemes of work. It is now necessary to develop written risk assessments in planning further, so that they are related to the teacher's experience and the particular pupils carrying out the work. Resources are generally good apart from the items of equipment noted earlier.
98. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Standards are now well above the national average for all pupils. Teaching has improved. The provision for students with special educational needs is much improved. Teachers now make more use of ICT. The working space for technicians has been increased but is still cramped.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in assessments at the end of Year 9 were below the national average, but achievement is good given students' starting points.
- Standards in GCSE ICT examinations were above the national average.
- The quality of ICT teaching is good overall.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Computer facilities are of very good quality.
- The use of ICT to support learning is well developed across many subjects.

### **Commentary**

99. In Year 9 teacher assessments show attainment below the national average, but there has been a rising trend over the last three years. Achievement is good. Students come to the school with a mixed experience of ICT. They make good progress in weekly ICT lessons, developing their knowledge and skills in a range of software including spreadsheet, database and web design packages.
100. GCSE results in 2003 were above the national average, continuing a rising trend for the past four years. All students now take either a GCSE or GNVQ ICT course in Year 10. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Coursework shows an emphasis on the use of spreadsheets and databases at a relatively advanced level.
101. Teaching and learning are good in Years 9 to 11. Teaching observed was consistently good in Year 9 and good or very good in half of the lessons observed in Years 10 and 11. Clear individual guidance and well-constructed, high quality on-line materials make complex tasks such as use of absolute references in spreadsheets accessible to all students in a class. Higher attaining students work independently and complete tasks quickly, showing depth of knowledge and understanding of the work they do. Lower-attaining students cover a good range of skills and are very well supported on a one-to-one basis by teaching and support staff. Students enjoy working with computers and demonstrate good levels of concentration and commitment in their work. Students who have special educational needs make very good

progress. Relationships with staff are generally very good. However, in the one lesson observed when management of students' behaviour was weak some students were inattentive and achieved little.

102. Leadership and management are very good. The head of ICT is committed to ensuring the highest possible standards in all areas of the department's work and provides clear direction to a professional, hard working and committed team. Responsibilities are well devolved, leading to the development of high quality teaching materials in Year 9 and the effective delivery of new courses including intermediate GNVQ ICT. Departmental development planning and review procedures are very effectively implemented. Technical network staff provide a high quality of support which ensures that the extensive curriculum network functions effectively and reliably.
103. There have been very good improvements in provision, planning and attainment since the previous inspection and the capacity to further improve is good.

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

104. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is good. Since the last inspection many subjects have made good progress in using ICT to support teaching and learning, including music, English, drama, design and technology and modern foreign languages. In music, for example, highly effective use is made of specialist software and in English good use is made of ICT for research, drafting, editing and presentation of work. In some other subjects, such as art and design, business studies, mathematics and science, the use of ICT is limited. The access to ICT facilities is sufficient for current levels of use, but will not support continuing development of use within subjects.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results are above the national average.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 because of their positive attitudes and good teaching.
- Some aspects of the school's timetable affect achievement in Year 9.
- There is insufficient fieldwork.
- Leadership and management are very good.

### **Commentary**

105. GCSE results are above average for both boys and girls. They are higher for girls; in 2003 the number of girls gaining grades A\*-C was well above average. Attainment has increased significantly over the last four years. Higher attaining students are now well challenged and the number achieving grade A\* or A is in line with the national average. These standards are confirmed by the work of students at present in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is very good.
106. Standards of work seen in Year 9 and the results of teacher assessments in 2003 are in line with national expectations. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls, except that more girls reach National Curriculum Level 7. Students' achievement in Year 9 is satisfactory overall but is limited by the time available and, in some classes, by timetabling arrangements. A number of classes are shared by two teachers who only see the class once a fortnight; and almost half of the lessons are taught by non-specialists who, although very well supported, sometimes lack confidence and depth of subject knowledge.

107. Teaching and learning are good. In no lessons were they less than satisfactory and they were good or very good in all Year 10 and 11 lessons. Lessons are planned to give a structure which guides students' learning and a brisk pace which ensures that students concentrate well. Teaching is enthusiastic and lively. Students' interest is also raised by the use of imaginative starter activities, which have an accent on developing thinking skills. Teachers encourage and value students' contributions, which play a significant part in moving the lesson on through well-managed question and answer sessions. Students who have special educational needs make good progress. Relationships in the classroom are very good so that students feel confident in these sessions. A notable feature is the sense of calm in most lessons combined with a strong sense of purpose amongst students. Although the use of assessment is good in all years, the quality of marking of students' books varies greatly between teachers.
108. There is still inadequate provision for fieldwork, especially in Year 9. Opportunities for data collection in the field, particularly through a physical geography investigation, together with a coherent programme of ICT, are lacking in Year 9. A very good example of the subject's contribution to students' spiritual development was seen in a Year 11 lesson in which the teacher evoked their awareness through a study of conflicts arising from the different uses of Dartmoor National Park.
109. In the short time she has been in post, the head of department has made a thorough evaluation of provision and identified areas in which good practice needs to be shared. She has a good vision for developing the subject. The geography teachers are responsive to new initiatives. They work closely as a team, supporting each other well. The department is very well managed. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The provision in Years 10 and 11 is better than that in Year 9.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good, very good and sometimes excellent teaching.
- Insufficient curriculum time in Year 9 affects standards and achievement.
- Standards are affected by staff teaching outside their subject specialisms.
- Specialist teachers and the library support students' independent learning very well.
- Assessment and marking procedures could be improved.
- Very good leadership and management result in an accurate appreciation of development priorities and close collaborative working supports achievement well.

### Commentary

110. The attainment of students at the end of Year 9 in 2003 as reflected in teacher assessments was above average, although the number of teachers involved casts doubt on the accuracy and consistency of some assessments. Results in the GCSE examinations have been on a rising trend over the last three years, from below to above average. In 2003 all candidates achieved a pass grade and boys and girls achieved equally well.
111. In Year 9 standards are average. Students select information well from a variety of sources and many complete good quality extended writing in assessed homeworks and on the subject of trench warfare. Literacy is above average and students make good use of the extensive facilities offered by the library, in undertaking convincing independent research in projects on the Second World War. The most significant weakness is that, although students often reach above average standards in the work they undertake, a shortage of curriculum time in Year 9

means that their knowledge of some elements of the expansion of trade and industry study unit is rather superficial. Overall achievement is satisfactory.

112. In Year 11 standards are above average and students achieve well. Many complete neatly presented and well-organised pieces of work which demonstrate good knowledge and understanding. Of particular note is the development of their source interrogation, analysis and interpretation skills, which is a major factor in the proportion of students achieving upper grades in the GCSE examinations. Students with special educational needs achieve well in all years because teachers adapt resources and tasks for them. Lower attaining students' work reveals some spelling and factual errors which are sometimes overlooked by teachers; additionally the depth and detail needed to support high grades is not always present.
113. The quality of teaching is good overall despite some inconsistency. In a lesson on liberal reforms, students' learning was excellent because of carefully chosen and well-targeted questions which effectively probed, extended and consolidated students' understanding. This enabled students to identify key words to get quickly to the nub of a source and also to analyse the extent to which a source was representative. In many lessons, the clarity and consistency of high expectations of achievement and behaviour meant that students responded very positively to the opportunities open to them. In lessons where teaching was satisfactory, a lack of confidence in subject knowledge, most common amongst non-specialist teachers and a failure to confront lack of attention or misbehaviour, had an impact on standards. Work is marked regularly but it is not always clear what the grades awarded mean and there is inconsistency in the extent and quality of teacher comment identifying the scope for improvement.
114. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department's dedication and commitment has fostered the openness and close collaborative working relations, which are a strong feature of the department. Non-specialist teachers are well supported. The recently conducted review has afforded her a clear and accurate appreciation of development priorities, many of which are already being addressed. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **Religious education**

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results in GCSE full and short course examinations are above average.
- Good teaching is well planned and enables students to achieve well.
- Non-specialist teaching does not always enable students to make enough progress so that their achievement is at least satisfactory.
- Marking of work and monitoring of students' achievement needs to be more rigorous.
- Statutory requirements for Year 11 are not fully met.

## **Commentary**

115. Students enter the school with varying levels of subject knowledge and understanding. By the end of Year 9 standards meet the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. Work seen during the inspection shows appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of major world religions, especially Buddhism and the impact that these have on the everyday life of believers. Achievement is good.
116. By the end of Year 10 standards exceed the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. For the majority of students, who follow a GCSE short course in the subject, standards are in line with the national average. Those that undertake the full GCSE course have results that are above the national average. All students show good understanding of Christian perspectives on a



range of matters, have secure knowledge of arguments for the existence of God and can support their views with appropriate evidence.

117. Standards of literacy and numeracy are good and in ICT satisfactory. As students move through the school their use of language increases in sophistication. Most use technical terminology accurately and in appropriate contexts. Key words are prominently displayed in RE classrooms.
118. The requirement to provide RE for all pupils is not met in Year 11. Students' attainment and their rate of progress are both affected by timetabling arrangements which lead to some classes being taught by more than one teacher and to the deployment of a number of non-specialist teachers in Year 10. However, students have still reached the levels expected by the Agreed Syllabus in their knowledge of and about religion by the end of Year 10. Students' achievement is good.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is better in Year 9 and in those lessons taught by specialist teachers. In most lessons teaching encourages students to be active participants and to achieve greater independence as learners. Students who have special educational needs make good progress. Teaching is well planned and is underpinned by teachers' good subject knowledge. The head of subject prepares work for non-specialist teachers, but their lack of subject expertise hinders a more detailed exploration of some demanding topics. In some cases class management is not sufficiently effective to enable students to be consistently involved in the learning. The attitudes of students to the subject and relationships, between them and with teachers, are good.
120. Work is marked regularly – some of it in great detail. A more realistic approach to marking and assessment is needed. This would allow students, on a regular basis, to have a clearer idea about the standards they are reaching and what they could do to improve both the standard and quality of their work.
121. Leadership of the subject is good and provides a clear direction for the department's work. Management is satisfactory and is hindered by the fact that, unfortunately, all members of this subject team also teach in other curriculum areas. This results in a lack of meetings and planned opportunities to further develop and share good practice between specialist and non-specialist teachers. There are few opportunities for classroom monitoring of standards, teaching and learning. The lack of provision for RE in Year 11 and post-16 means that curriculum progression and planning for 14-19 years is unsatisfactory.
122. Even though statutory requirements for RE are still not fully met, progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards in the main school have risen. In addition, work to meet the learning needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is now provided.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE examination results are well above average and have improved over recent years.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and experience, which is brought to bear very effectively in their teaching.
- Students are well motivated to learn.
- Students do not all have experience of computer-aided manufacture.

## **Commentary**

123. The 2003 teacher assessments of Year 9 students show standards that are above average and that have improved over recent years. Students' current work is above average and, taking account of prior attainment, achievement is good.
124. The 2003 GCSE results are well above both national and school averages and show a rising trend over two years. Current work of Year 11 students is above average, with some variation between the design and technology options. Achievement overall is good. Girls' work is better than boys', but boys are showing improvement at a greater rate than the national trend.
125. Students in all year groups produce good quality practical work. Design work is generally good but students do not always make the link between the stages of the process, for example, by giving reasons for their design decisions. Students have insufficient skills in computer-aided manufacture. Students with special educational needs make good progress, similar to that of their peers.
126. Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from being taught by teachers with very good knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. Time is well used in lessons, which leads to students making good progress. Good relationships and high expectations result in students having good attitudes to learning. There are some effective assessment systems indicating how students can improve their work, in Year 9 food technology and textiles technology, for example, but these are not used consistently throughout the department. Some classroom organisation does not lead to good behaviour management.
127. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is very good, as a range of design and technology options is available at GCSE level, plus facilities for vocational courses. There is very good extra-curricular provision and many students take advantage of this additional opportunity.
128. Leadership and management are good. There is a good sense of teamwork in the two areas of the department. However, the tendency to work as separate units means that some good practice is not shared by all. Some issues, for example, risk assessment and other elements of health and safety, are yet to be resolved. The technicians make a significant contribution to the work of the department. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. There have been improvements in the facilities for food technology and better access to information and communication technology since the previous inspection. However, some graphics lessons are taught in a large communal area with two groups sharing the space. This leads to considerable cross noise and does not create a good learning environment. One room for textiles is small. There are still issues concerning storage, which were mentioned in the two previous inspections. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Good attitudes and relationships contribute positively to students' learning.
- There is some teaching which is of good quality.
- Planning for classes in Years 10 and 11 does not meet the differing needs of students at both ends of the attainment spectrum.
- The course taught in Year 9 does not ensure that all students receive a thorough grounding in the necessary basic skills.
- The achievement of some students in Years 9, 10 and 11 is adversely affected when their class is taught by two or three teachers.
- Computers are used but not sufficiently to develop ideas creatively.

## Commentary

129. In 2003 by the end of Year 9 students were working at a level below that expected nationally according to teacher assessments. This was confirmed by work seen during the inspection.
130. There is a downward trend over recent years.
131. The percentage of grades from A\*-C at GCSE in 2000, 2001 and 2002 has been above the national average. The percentage of students gaining A\*-C grades at GCSE in 2003 was well below the national average. Both boys and girls achieved grades in art which were significantly below grades they achieved in the other subjects that they took at GCSE. In 2003 there was about half the percentage of A\*, A and B grades than are expected nationally. There was almost twice the proportion of D and E grades than expected nationally. According to work seen during the inspection, students in Year 11 are currently working at a broadly average standard, but within a wide range.
132. Achievement is unsatisfactory at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Students arrive in Year 9 having had a very varied experience of art. Baseline assessment is not used adequately to inform the planning of the Year 9 course. The course structure does not ensure that all students are taught what they need to enable them to reach the end of Year 9 with a thorough grounding in all the basic skills and a good knowledge and understanding about how their own art fits into the context of art produced by established artists both in this country and abroad.
133. Students who choose to study art at GCSE begin their course with very varied technical skills, knowledge and understanding. Students are encouraged to approach their work individually, to be responsible for their learning and to use the teacher as a facilitator, asking for help and guidance when they feel it necessary. Two or three different teachers teach two of the three classes across the two-week timetable. Planning by teachers tends to focus on tasks rather than learning and does not take sufficiently into account the differing needs of students. As a result, higher attaining students who are more confident and proactive enjoy the freedom to pursue themes, feel confident to choose between the different opinions and advice offered by various teachers and ask for help when they feel they need it. Lower attaining students feel less able to choose between varied advice and guidance; they often do not know the right questions to ask and may not ask for help as often as they need it. In extreme cases this leads to feelings of frustration, isolation and lack of motivation. Planning fails to provide adequate challenge for higher attaining students and sufficient support for those who find art difficult, whether they have special educational needs or not.
134. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall. Teaching in lessons observed ranged from good to unsatisfactory. There is some teaching that is good. Where learning objectives are clearly explained and pace is fairly brisk, students are motivated and productive and teaching and learning are good. Evaluations form a natural end to these lessons and consolidate what has been learnt during the lesson. Discussion and questioning are used well. However, where teaching is unsatisfactory learning objectives are unclear, are inappropriate or are a list of tasks to be completed. Planning lacks sufficient challenge to engage and motivate higher attaining students and to support lower attaining students resulting in low level off-task talk and a large amount of wasted time. Question and explanation are not used adequately to encourage meaningful dialogue and on occasion articulate students were actively discouraged. Computers are used but mainly as a tool for research and not to develop ideas creatively in any depth. ICT facilities within the art department are inadequate.
135. Although there is plenty of visual material available there is a lack of high quality artefacts, particularly items from other cultures, on which to base observational work. This means that secondary sources are relied on most heavily. Art makes a satisfactory contribution to

student's cultural development and a very good contribution to the environment through plenty of displays of artwork around the school.

136. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The new subject leader has put in place assessment procedures which ensure that marking and day-to-day feedback to students is satisfactory; however this is not yet used adequately to inform the planning of courses. The self-evaluative review of the department does not adequately identify strengths and weaknesses and has not put in place measures to raise standards and improve achievement. Monitoring of teaching has failed to identify weaknesses in teaching and learning. Strategies to ensure consistency in teaching are insufficient and do not provide an effective delivery of courses particularly where groups are shared between two and sometimes three teachers. Achievement has declined, as has the overall quality of teaching and therefore progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

## Dance

137. Dance was not inspected in detail, but was a major focus within the inspection of physical education.
138. Since the school achieved performing arts status the provision for dance has been much improved and its profile within the school greatly enhanced. The provision is now **very good**. In Year 9 both girls and boys show interest in and enjoyment of the subject. They develop a good understanding of composition, skills and techniques and use specialist vocabulary correctly. Teaching is very effective with teachers having excellent subject knowledge and high levels of expertise and enthusiasm.
139. In Years 10 and 11 many students, mostly girls, choose to study dance for GCSE. Although students find the theory difficult they make very good progress and achieve very well because teachers modify and adapt written tasks to meet students' needs. Examination results in dance are good for those students in Year 11 and are very good in the sixth form. Students' own performances are guided by thorough explanations from teachers and by detailed suggestions for improvement. Expert step-by-step demonstrations by the teachers are carefully copied and practised by the students. In designing their own sequence of movements they demonstrate an understanding of choreographic devices, repetition, rhythm and the use of space.
140. The department is extremely well managed and organised and the leadership is very good. The head of department provides clear, detailed documentation of a very high standard. At present liaison between the physical education department and the dance department is inadequate with the result that students' achievements and progress are not shared and discussed. Resources are used most effectively to support and develop activities. The new dance studio provides a professional environment which is beneficial to the standards achieved by students.

## Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The energy and enthusiasm of the teaching engages students and increases their involvement in drama; students work hard to succeed.
- The planned curriculum develops theatre knowledge, understanding and skills as well as developing an understanding of society and justice and injustice.
- The head of department has excellent directing skills and this leads to outstanding performances by students; GCSE students produce high quality performances.

- Some students are disadvantaged because they are not timetabled to use the specialist drama spaces.

## Commentary

141. In Year 9, students enter the school having had a range of different drama experience and are working below the expected level. After a term they are able to make drama and perform simple theatre pieces, they have acquired a basic knowledge of theatre strategies and are able to perform simple scenes from Shakespeare. Achievement is satisfactory.
142. Results at GCSE are well above average; they improved last year, particularly the percentage of students gaining A\*/A grades. At the beginning of the GCSE course students' work is below the national standard. However, they learn progressively about developing character through using states of tension and archetypal character. By the time they are in Year 11, GCSE students devise excellent work and have highly developed performance skills. The achievement of boys is equal to that of girls, although fewer boys opt to study drama to GCSE. There are currently few students from ethnic minority groups involved in drama examination or extra-curricular work and they achieve as well as their peers.
143. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. A significant proportion of the teaching is very good and excellent performances of text and devised work take place. In these lessons teachers have high energy and develop very good working relationships. They use practical storytelling exercises to demonstrate how students can make decisions and "take the imaginative and creative leap" when devising their own work. As a result, students are able to take risks and develop exciting theatre which achieves good results, knowing that they can rely on the teacher to support as well as challenge them. In performances students use such strategies as repetitive rhythmic movement, split stage, freezes and still images as they devise work based on Romeo and Juliet and a contemporary story of two American lovers who took their lives. Using video recording and a digital projector they are able to watch their work and this supports their written evaluation.
144. The texts and themes explored are relevant and interesting and engage the students who enjoy lessons and generally work hard. Work on Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet permits students to break away from stereotypical characterisation and relate the work to a contemporary audience. Lesson planning is detailed and ensures progression and continuity for groups of students taught by more than one teacher. Teachers identify gifted and talented students and challenge them. Students who have special educational needs achieve well in drama and many of them are excellent performers. In some cases, however, planning does not take account of the necessity to adapt to the specific needs of the group to repeat work and support students by coaching when they are learning new skills. Some students have insufficient specialist vocabulary and underdeveloped critical powers.
145. The extremely experienced head of department is also an advanced skills teacher. Under his leadership the department makes a very good contribution to the schools performing arts specialist college status. He works within the community and more widely in the education community of Bedford. He has a clear vision for the department and manages the department well. He is energetic and enthusiastic and an extremely good director; he also provides opportunities for other members of the department to direct work with students. He is beginning to develop team teaching opportunities and further relevant professional development for less experienced colleagues. Leadership and management are very good.
146. There are many high quality public performances and productions in school which also tour to partner schools, in this country and in Germany. The school is also involved in the National Connections. There are many visits to theatres in the local area and in London. Some are curriculum and examination based but many are for students' enjoyment and entertainment.
147. Drama makes a significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development through the issues being explored, the genre of work and the emotional elements evoked.

148. Accommodation is in a specialist drama studio and the stage of the hall and the technical resources available in these areas enhance the quality of the work of students. Some lessons take place in non-specialist spaces, particularly during examinations. This has a negative effect on students' group work.
149. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained and an increased number of students opt for GCSE. There has been good improvement.

## Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- GCSE examination results in recent years have been very good.
- Excellent use is made of music technology.
- There is an excellent provision of extra-curricular activities.

### Commentary

150. Students enter Year 9 with overall below average standards, but with a significant few having very good musical skills. Students achieve well, with most reaching average standards by the end of the year and a few reaching well above average standards. In recent years, GCSE results have been consistently above average. In 2003, ten of the 23 candidates gained A\* or A passes and nearly all gained a grade in the range A\*-C. Boys and girls both achieve higher than the national average.
151. Year 9 students have important gaps in their musical education when they arrive at the school. Through very good teaching and their very good attitudes, they quickly acquire skills which enable them to compose and perform successfully by the end of the year. They have a good understanding of how to use music technology which is often quite complex. Though most have done little in adding chords to melodies on keyboards, many can now do so, as exemplified in their work on 12-bar blues sequences. Students who have special educational needs achieve satisfactorily, although some are held back by difficulty in concentrating. Talented students achieve very well and respond positively to high levels of challenge. In Years 10 and 11, students achieve very well, progressing from average to overall good and even very good standards. The compositions of many are of a very high quality, showing a secure knowledge of orchestration and structure and revealing considerable creative flair.
152. Teaching and learning are very good, with teaching having some excellent features. Lessons are finely focused, brisk and appropriately varied. Teachers have high expectations. Excellent informative worksheets are used which enable students to progress quickly. These often include clear National Curriculum targets to be achieved by the end of lessons. Subject material is used which appeals to the students and encourages them to want to learn. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and skills for teaching music technology.
153. Leadership and management are excellent. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for music has a vision to take the department forward and the management skills to put that into effect. All members of the department and visiting members of the music staff, work strongly as a team. Together they ensure that opportunities within the curriculum and those available through a massive provision of excellent quality extra-curricular activities, develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of a huge number of students. The accommodation and resources are excellent and are fully used every day to maximise learning opportunities. There has been very good progress since the last inspection.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very good range and quality of extra-curricular activities.
- Insufficient collaboration between the dance and physical education departments means that information on students' progress is not shared sufficiently.
- Limited access to indoor facilities restricts the choice of activities that students can study.
- Students' positive attitudes and good standards of behaviour contribute to their learning.
- Results in GCSE examinations are good.

### Commentary

154. Standards for all students, including those taking GCSE, are good and are above national expectations. An increasing number of students are studying for examinations. They benefit from good teaching by specialists and careful monitoring and thorough analysis of their progress which provides detailed written guidance on how they may improve.
155. Students in Year 9, whose skills are above average on entry to the school, make good progress. They increase their knowledge and expertise, participate in a wider range of physical activities and games and achieve well. They know how to warm up safely and independently and understand the importance of exercise for a healthy lifestyle. Throughout their time in the school they refine the techniques and skills required to play games with confidence and enjoyment. The number of well attended games and sporting activities that take place at lunchtime, after school and on Saturday mornings, contributes significantly in further developing students' interests, expertise and social skills. The teachers in the physical education department give freely of their own time to support extra-curricular activities so that a very full programme is available to students.
156. Results in GCSE are above average. The number of GCSE students has a positive effect on the standards achieved by all students in core physical education. Achievement in both core and GCSE groups is good, with students taking GCSE seen to be working at well above average standards. A degree of choice in the physical activities and games in which students taking core PE may participate helps to motivate and maintain their interest. However, this choice is in practice limited by the lack of availability of those indoor facilities which are shared with the dance department.
157. Overall the quality of teaching is good. Activities are well planned and appropriate so that skills and understanding are developed logically. Good relationships, based on mutual respect, give students the confidence to try new activities in a safe, controlled environment, as seen in a lesson for Year 11 girls, where they were introduced to the skills of hockey goalkeeping. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Behaviour is good because most students are interested and enjoy the challenging activities in the lessons.
158. The demands of the timetable and the difficulty in recruiting PE teachers, are such that a number of non-specialists teach some physical activities and games. The head of department tries to ensure that these teachers' individual interests and expertise are acknowledged in the activities they teach. Detailed planning to ensure students' health and safety and the support provided for non-specialists is good but takes a significant amount of the head of department's time. At present the involvement of non-specialists is not having a negative impact on standards but does affect some students' choice of activities.
159. Assessment procedures are effective overall with students regularly receiving grades for effort and achievement. Greater collaboration with staff from the dance department is needed so

that information on students' achievements in both physical education and dance is more effectively shared. This is particularly important when a student's work is assessed at the end of Year 9 and when performance in dance is used as part of a student's GCSE practical work.

160. Teachers work well together organising and managing the tasks necessary for the department's smooth running and are ably led by the head of the department. He provides good support to new teachers and to PGCE students. He is aware of the department's strengths and of the areas that need improvement and is actively working with staff to ensure that these issues are identified, targeted and addressed. Leadership and management are good. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection and most areas for improvement identified in the previous report have been addressed.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business education**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Current students are making good progress in lessons and are achieving well.
- Leadership and management of the business area is good with a clear vision for developing the subject.
- Students are now taught by three subject specialists with good expertise.
- Whilst teaching overall is good, some aspects could be improved to reinforce understanding, particularly for the lower attainers.
- Assessment and marking of students' work is generally thorough and accurate but does not include enough feedback on how to improve.
- There is insufficient subject accommodation to deliver the courses in an appropriate learning environment.

### **Commentary**

161. The department caters for students with a wide range of attainment with about a third of the year group taking the 2003 GCSE examination in business studies. Just over half of these students achieved grades A\*-C, marginally less than the national average, with students on average achieving as well as predicted. This is in line with the previous year which had similarly large numbers. Classes were previously taught by some non-specialist teachers, a situation which has now been rectified with all students now being taught by experienced and knowledgeable business teachers. The current GCSE course is being phased out in favour of the applied GCSE course with its higher weighting towards coursework, which many students find more accessible. Although there is still some unfamiliarity with the assessment and resource demands of this new course, formal programmes of study are in place and Year 10 students have reacted positively to the new course and are enjoying lessons. As a consequence they are achieving well. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good and students are reaching standards in line with the average.
162. The quality of teaching is good overall, with very good student-teacher relationships, lively students who are managed positively in lessons and teachers' business expertise ensuring that students make good progress in lessons and over time. In a very well prepared and stimulating Year 10 marketing lesson on promotion, students worked co-operatively and productively to design relevant and eye-catching advertisements. The teacher's patient management, individual support and well-designed check sheet for use in a large Year 11 class working on their coursework, ensured that all students made progress in the lesson. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Students' work shows a good understanding and use of a range of relevant business concepts including human resource



management, how businesses grow and basic business finance. Students' written work is assessed and marked appropriately and this is often supplemented with student interviews, but whilst good work is praised there is not enough detailed feedback on how students can improve. The sharing of good classroom practice, for example in the use and design of more explicit learning outcomes, will ensure greater consistency of lesson delivery.

163. Leadership and management of the department are good with the head of department setting a clear vision for the development of the subject and managing the transition to the applied course very well. A well-structured programme of study is in place although resource requirements are not yet matched to the demands of its delivery and assessment. The quality of teaching is monitored effectively and the newly qualified business teacher is provided with good support and advice. Whilst there is sufficient accommodation on site for the delivery of the subject, there are insufficient dedicated business classrooms for business studies to be taught in a suitable, appropriately resourced working environment. Students have the necessary access to computers but dedicated ICT lessons are often hampered by insufficient individual workstations. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

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

164. All students have one lesson a week of a guidance programme taught by form tutors, which covers personal, social, health, careers and citizenship education. This lesson fell outside the inspection and so it was not possible to sample teaching and learning in this programme.

### **Citizenship**

165. No citizenship lessons took place during the inspection and insufficient students' work was available for scrutiny to enable an overall judgement on provision to be made.
166. Following an initial audit of provision across the curriculum, units of work which are taught within the weekly guidance period have been developed. Good planning has produced interesting and challenging units; for example, on law and order in Year 9 and trade unions and rights and responsibilities in the workplace in Year 10. The programme includes visits from magistrates; research based on the form's involvement with a charity; and the study of democracy and the electoral system linked to the year and school councils. Citizenship strands of enquiry and participation are promoted in these lessons. For example, Year 11 students undertake a decision-making exercise on a sports centre in which they draw on their understanding of local government budgeting from their Year 10 lessons. The time to extend the provision of citizenship in the crowded guidance programme is limited.
167. Some other subjects make a good contribution to students' citizenship education. Good examples were seen in history and religious education lessons, where citizenship objectives were made clear to students. However, there is a wide variation in the commitment of different subjects for sharing the responsibility for teaching citizenship. Some subjects do not identify opportunities within their schemes of work and do not make objectives clear or ensure that students keep a record. Consequently, students have a narrow perception of their citizenship education.
168. The statutory requirement to report students' progress has so far not been met. There is also some lack of compliance by teachers in using the systems that have been set up for recording students' experience and assessing their progress. Monitoring the provision of citizenship within guidance lessons, as well as across the curriculum, lacks rigour. Insufficient time is available for the subject co-ordinator to monitor teaching and learning satisfactorily. Arrangements are currently being made for the first statutory assessment at the end of Year 9.
169. An evaluation of current provision led by the co-ordinator recognises these shortcomings. It is proposed that from 2004-5 citizenship in Years 10 and 11 will be taught as a short GCSE course, largely outside the guidance programme. There is regular liaison with partner middle

schools through meetings chaired by the co-ordinator. This has led to piloting a system for on-going assessment and recording across phases and the use of the same series of texts.

170. From the evidence available during the inspection the main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A relevant programme of varied activities has been developed for the guidance programme.
- Students' progress is not reported to parents.
- There is inadequate monitoring of provision and of recording students' progress.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	9	55.6	80.1	0.0	23.7	16.7	29.9
Biology	7	85.7	65.2	14.3	11.1	28.6	20.6
Business studies	12	91.7	76.4	0.0	16.3	27.5	26.2
Chemistry	9	44.4	72.7	11.1	13.9	13.3	24.1
Communication studies	16	62.5	86.4	18.8	23.8	21.9	32.0
Dance	3	100.0	86.9	66.7	35.0	46.7	34.5
Drama/Theatre studies	14	85.7	86.5	14.4	19.6	27.9	30.6
Design and technology	17	88.2	74.9	17.6	15.1	32.4	25.3
Economics	8	25.0	73.6	0.0	20.1	5.0	26.4
English Literature	6	83.3	85.9	16.7	19.1	35.0	30.2
French	5	80.0	78.2	0.0	18.9	22.0	27.6
General studies	106	53.8	73.9	0.9	17.8	13.7	25.7
Geography	7	42.9	74.3	14.3	19.8	15.7	26.5
German	2	50.0	81.5	1.0	19.3	10.0	28.9
History	5	100.0	80.7	0.0	19.5	34.0	28.6
Information and communication technology	10	90.0	67.0	30.0	10.9	33.0	21.4
Mathematics	20	20.0	61.9	0.0	17.1	5.0	22.1
Music	5	100.0	86.5	0.0	21.4	34.0	30.7
Other sciences	3	66.7	71.4	33.3	15.8	30.0	24.3
Physical education	1	0.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	0.0	23.1
Psychology	29	79.3	69.7	17.2	16.7	26.6	24.1
Physics	8	62.5	68.9	12.5	14.4	20.0	22.7
Religious studies	5	80.0	80.2	40.0	22.6	36.0	29.8
Science - single award	6	100.0	N/a	16.7	N/a	35.0	N/a
Sociology	12	100.0	71.8	41.7	18.4	40.8	25.4

### Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art an design	12	100.0	98.6	33.3	50.2	81.7	87.5
Biology	15	100.0	96.4	46.7	39.2	88.0	78.6
Business studies	15	100.0	98.7	53.3	36.8	88.0	80.1
Business studies VCE	17	76.5	88.6	11.8	20.6	43.5	60.1
Chemistry	11	100.0	97.6	27.3	49.0	80.0	84.9
Communication studies	16	100.0	99.4	62.5	37.8	93.8	82.1
Dance	8	100.0	98.5	62.5	44.9	95.0	83.9
Design and technology	32	100.0	97.8	40.6	35.0	84.4	77.9
Drama/theatre studies	11	100.0	99.5	36.4	40.1	80.0	83.6
Economics	8	100.0	98.9	50.0	52.0	77.5	88.3
English literature	28	100.0	99.5	39.3	46.5	83.6	86.5
French	2	100.0	98.8	100.0	51.5	100.0	87.6
General studies	69	100.0	94.7	24.6	31.0	72.2	73.1
Geography	14	100.0	98.7	35.7	44.5	82.9	84.0
German	2	50.0	98.4	0.0	47.9	30.0	84.8
Health and social care VCE	20	100.0	93.2	5.0	22.3	63.5	63.5
History	22	100.0	99.0	40.9	44.6	80.9	84.6
Information and communication technology	28	100.0	95.6	35.7	24.6	75.0	69.5
Leisure and recreation VCE	30	93.3	88.1	33.3	15.0	74.7	57.9
Mathematics	14	92.9	96.7	42.9	55.6	77.1	88.8
Music	7	100.0	98.8	28.6	38.9	77.1	81.1
Physical education	7	100.0	98.0	14.3	30.9	68.6	75.2
Psychology	46	97.8	97.4	54.3	42.7	89.1	81.8
Physics	16	100.0	96.7	43.8	44.6	85.0	81.7
Religious studies	5	100.0	98.8	80.0	46.7	104.0	85.6
Science - single award	4	100.0	N/a	50.0	N/a	90.0	N/a
Sociology	15	100.0	98.2	80.0	44.3	105.3	83.6

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The inspection focus was on English and German, although some work in French was also sampled.

### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' subject knowledge and high expectations encourage hard work and high standards.
- Standards of attainment in communication studies are very high.
- Students are well supported, academically and pastorally, by their teachers.
- In some lessons students have limited opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning.
- Recent English literature examination results are erratic.

### **Commentary**

171. In 2001 standards for all students were very high in A-level English literature. In 2002 the standards attained were below average for female students and in line with the national average for male students. In 2003 results came closer to the national average for the higher grades. The pattern of attainment is therefore erratic and not always consistent with predicted grades and prior attainment. In communication studies, which is part of the post-16 provision offered through the English department, results in 2003 were outstanding.
172. Work seen during the inspection was of a higher standard than recent results in literature examinations would suggest. Students listen very well in lessons. They respond to teachers' questions confidently and keenly and when given opportunity – for example, in role-playing the stage directions from *Translations* – they show imagination, intelligent understanding and a willingness to take risks. Writing was at least capable and well managed. At best it showed genuine engagement and critical grasp.
173. Good achievement results from teaching which was never less than good. Teaching in two thirds of lessons observed was very good. Teachers are expert in their subject. Their knowledge underpins students' own developing understanding of literary and critical writing. Sometimes, perhaps because of the difficult nature of some texts, teachers do much of the work and students are more passive listeners than active contributors. In the best lessons – for example, an examination of the concept of identity in communication studies – students are required to discuss, reflect and develop their thinking through debate and presentation. Teacher-student relationships are very good across the board. Students know that they are well supported and truly appreciate teachers' availability and concern. Marking is regular and detailed. Students know what their current standards are and what they need to do to improve.
174. Leadership and management are good. The head of department shows in her own work a very effective model of student centred teaching. The success of communication studies is testimony to thoughtful curriculum development. There is now a focus on how to make arrangements for literature more responsive to student interest and aptitude so as to improve retention from Year 12 to Year 13 and positively affect attainment. The use of assessment data is increasingly sharp and allows for effective tracking of progress and realistic target setting. For these reasons improvement since the last inspection has been at least satisfactory.

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

175. Sixth form students have good language and literacy skills. These result from continuing attention to matters of literacy within their sixth form courses. In English, religious education and music for example, inspectors noted extended writing of high quality, together with opportunities to practise and hone skills of discussion and oral presentation. In all subjects except art attention to literacy was at least satisfactory. Key skills in communication are effectively taught within GNVQ courses. Students have the opportunity to retake GCSE English as part of their sixth form programme. Extra-curricular opportunities for drama, debate and public speaking further develop students' skills and interests. Standards and provision are therefore good.

### **Modern foreign languages**

176. Although the focus was on German, two lessons of **French** were also sampled. There are eight pupils in Year 12 and two in Year 13 studying French. Retention rates are good. Each class was observed once and work analysed. In recent GCE A-level examinations all students gained a pass grade. In 2003 the two candidates gained grade B. In GCE AS examinations in the last two years the proportion of students gaining grades A and B and the average point score have been below the national average. Current standards in Year 12 are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Students lack oral confidence. They write relatively short passages, a few of which are of a good standard, but grammatical accuracy is below and, sometimes, well below average. In Year 13 standards are below average. In lessons inspected, achievement, teaching and learning were satisfactory in Year 12 and unsatisfactory in Year 13.

### **German**

Provision in German is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are very good linguists; German is used extensively in class.
- Very good use of interactive whiteboards enables lively discussion of current material.
- Lessons are well paced and time is used to the full.
- Very good relationships and use of humour encourage participation.
- Marking does not always indicate clearly the quality of the students' work.

### **Commentary**

177. There are 12 students in Year 12 and three in Year 13. Retention rates in both courses are good. In recent years, too few students have taken GCE A- and AS level German to make valid comparisons with national averages. No students achieved high grades.

178. Current standards in Year 13 are broadly average and in Year 12 above average. In both Years 12 and 13 students' understanding and range of vocabulary are above average because teachers expect German to be used most of the time and consistently expose students to wide-ranging, ambitious language. Achievement in both years is good. In Year 12 several students are still adjusting to the big jump in demand from GCSE and lack oral confidence and grammatical accuracy, but about a third argue well with quite good expressions. By Year 13, students speak quite confidently about topical and ethical subjects. They enjoy the immediacy of work with the interactive whiteboard; for example they read about and discussed the results of the previous day's German elections. In both Years 12 and 13 students write at good length on a range of topics, but their grammatical accuracy is weaker than their ability to convey meaning and prevents their work from reaching the highest levels.

179. Teaching and learning are good. They are sometimes very good. The teachers' high expectations, their selection of appropriate and topical materials and their encouragement and

desire to make learning enjoyable are major factors in the students' good achievements. Good communication helps the successful sharing of Year 12 teaching within the local consortium; currently all the students are from this school. Marking is careful and includes helpful comment, but teachers do not use a common system nor do they always indicate clearly through the mark scheme the quality of the work and the aspects that need most attention.

180. Leadership and management are good. All Year 12 and 13 students benefit from frequent opportunities to speak with a German assistant. Resources are very good. Opportunities to join a German exchange and other school visits to Germany offer additional enrichment. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is a wide range of mathematics courses available and student numbers are improving.
- Leadership and management are effective and teachers are committed to raising standards.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and present topics clearly and competently.
- Opportunities to vary teaching approaches, or to use ICT, are missed in some lessons.

### **Commentary**

181. GCE A-level results in 2003 were around average and similar standards apply in the current Year 13 cohort. The number of students studying mathematics to GCE A-level is disappointingly small in both of these years. Results at both A-level and AS level were above average in 2002 with a larger group. The department has taken suitable steps to improve its popularity again. The number of students moving on to GCE A-level from the current Year 12 is likely to be much higher. There is a wide choice of courses within the GCE AS and A-level programme including pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and further mathematics. In addition the department runs a key skills application of number course within the GNVQ programme. This group of students were away on work experience during the inspection. Evidence from their class work indicates that they are reaching an average standard.
182. Both teaching and learning are satisfactory and students achieve in line with their capabilities. Teachers have a very secure command of the subject and plan lessons well so that students acquire skills and knowledge steadily. In the best lessons teachers involve students effectively in discussion and practical activities to enhance their understanding further. For example in a well taught mechanics lesson the teacher picked up a heavy case in different ways to illustrate horizontal and vertical components of work and energy. Students also came to the front to write up their solutions and generate discussion. The net result was that students gained a much better appreciation of the factors governing conservation of energy. Teachers present topics clearly and competently but can be rather didactic so that students are insufficiently engaged or enthused. In some lessons opportunities are missed to use ICT to enhance learning and enliven a topic.
183. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are strongly committed to improving the popularity of the subject and raising students' standards of attainment. The implementation of curricular changes in Years 10 and 11 in the last two years has helped increase the number of students taking mathematics in Year 12 this year and augurs well for the future. The recent departmental review correctly pinpoints other areas of development to improve sixth form mathematics provision. The tracking of students' performance through the course is good and marking of their work is satisfactory overall. On occasions comments on students' work are insufficiently detailed. The commitment to staff training, to meet the needs of new courses as these arise, is strong. The use of ICT is underdeveloped. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

184. Provision is satisfactory and standards are average overall. In science students make sense of large negative numbers in work on entropy. In design and technology they show a high standard of geometrical appreciation when completing a perspective drawing for a stage set. In history students make effective use of time lines in a chronology of events. Students show weak application of number skills in GNVQ leisure and recreation. They complete simple calculations on calorie intake and represent survey results graphically, but without evaluation, in the GNVQ health and social care course.

## SCIENCE

185. The inspection focus was on biology. However, work was also sampled in chemistry and physics and one lesson in each subject was inspected. Teaching and learning were good in chemistry and very good in physics. Students achieved appropriately.

### Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are consistently well above the national average.
- Students achieve better results than might be predicted based on their GCSE performance.
- Very good teaching and learning leading to high achievement.
- There is very good leadership and management of a successful team of teachers.
- Students are not able to develop the measurement aspects of ICT because there are insufficient sensors and portable computers.

### Commentary

186. Results at GCE A-level have been well above the national average for the last three years. GCE AS results for the last two years have been above the national average. Biology is a popular subject with two groups in each of Years 12 and 13. The proportion of students deciding not to continue with this subject into Year 13 is quite small. Students achieve better results than might be expected based on their GCSE results.
187. The standard of work of current students is well above average. Students' notes are well organised and of a high quality. Achievement is good. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. Excellent subject knowledge underpins this high quality teaching. There is a very strong team of teachers who work very well together. One very effective way in which teachers support students' learning is to get students to prepare and give presentations to the group. This method helps students improve both their biological learning and their already high quality communication skills. Teachers give students many opportunities through the use of ICT to develop their research skills. However, because there are insufficient sensors and portable computers students are unable to develop the important ICT skill of measurement.
188. Teaching is carefully planned. Year 13 students learnt very well about the structure and function of the placenta. The teacher had broken this lesson into a series of short activities using a wide range of resources. Similarly Year 12 students learnt very well about balanced diets because the teacher backed up the activities with a challenging questioning technique, which stretched the students fully. These are just two examples that are typical of the consistently high quality teaching in the department.
189. The recently appointed head of biology has very good leadership and management skills. She has introduced some new ideas, which will improve what was already a strong department.



There is a good balance of experience in the team and less experienced members of the team receive excellent support. Teachers rightly enter students for module tests at the earliest opportunity thus taking full advantage of the modular approach. The department has some good links with the wider community including industry. All students are very well informed about their current level of working and what they need to do to improve because the teachers use assessment procedures very well.

190. Since the last inspection standards have improved from above to well above the national average. The use of ICT has improved with only the measurement aspects still to be developed.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' current achievement is good.
- The teaching of ICT is at least good and sometimes very good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Leadership and management of sixth form courses is very good.
- Provision for ICT across the curriculum is good.
- Attainment in computing at AS Level in 2003 was below average.

### **Commentary**

191. The 2003 GCE A-level examination results in both ICT and computing are in line with the national average. GCE A-level ICT results have shown a steady improvement over the past three years, with pass rates reaching 100 per cent in 2003. Departmental analysis indicates that many students outperformed their predicted grades. In GCE A-level computing there is consistently a 100 per cent pass rate. At GCE AS level over 89 per cent of ICT students achieved a pass grade but in computing many students failed to achieve their target grade.
192. Achievement in lessons and work seen is good overall. It is very good in ICT and good in computing. Students demonstrate high levels of concentration and effort, are organised in their approach to study, take pride in their work and are developing well in their capacity to work independently. As a result they make good progress in their development of knowledge, skills and understanding. Students' work observed from the new GNVQ intermediate ICT course showed good achievement.
193. Teaching and learning are good. Very effective teaching takes place in ICT, based upon well-planned schemes of work and challenging practical tasks. Particular strengths are the good questioning of students and the pace of learning, which help to develop concentration and application. A range of teaching techniques are employed, demonstrating awareness of differing learning styles and work is reinforced and consolidated very effectively. In both ICT and computing teachers have very good knowledge of their subject which gives pupils confidence in their learning. Regular and thorough assessment and monitoring of progress ensures that students are well informed about their progress and know what they need to do to improve. Relationships between staff and students are good humoured and purposeful and students work with confidence and enjoyment, expressing very positive views about their courses.
194. Leadership and management of sixth form courses are very good. The head of department provides clear vision and leads the teaching team very effectively. Clear and effective lines of responsibility for managing and developing sixth form programmes of learning have been established. Over the past two years departmental schemes of work have been reviewed and refined in a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation and development process. This has

included the taking of appropriate action to address the issues arising from disappointing results in the GCE AS computing course.

195. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. GCE AS level and GCE A-level ICT courses have been introduced successfully and this year choice in the sixth form has been further broadened by the provision of an intermediate GNVQ course in ICT. Major investment has been made in ICT that has resulted in increased access for all sixth form students.

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

196. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is good. Since the last inspection many subjects have made good progress in the use of ICT to support teaching and learning and in the development of pupils' key skills, including music, English, drama, design and technology, history and modern foreign languages. Examples of excellent practice include the creative use of specialist facilities in GCE A-level music technology and the programming of a microchip for an altimeter in GCE A-level electronic products. In drama innovative use is made of the Internet to establish links with theatre company members, performers and cameramen. In modern languages the Internet is used effectively to keep students abreast of current affairs, with students highly motivated, for example, by discussion of the weekend's French regional election results. There are difficulties of access to ICT in two of the vocational courses.

### **HUMANITIES**

197. The focus for inspection was on history and psychology. However, work in geography, government and politics and in religious studies was sampled.
198. In **geography**, good teaching was seen in a Year 13 lesson in which a variety of short activities promoted students' thinking skills and ensured good understanding of a difficult concept. With the same group of students interesting methods, which might be seen as novel in the sixth form, have reinforced students' learning. These included constructing models or producing three-dimensional posters of a periglacial landscape. Students' achievement was good.
199. A lesson of **government and politics** was also sampled. Students learned very well because of very detailed planning, brisk pace and challenging tasks that involved them in active discussion and developed their independence in learning very well.
200. Work and two lessons of **religious studies** were sampled. In a Year 13 lesson, teaching was very good and students' achievement was high. Students were constantly challenged and showed high levels of knowledge and understanding of social science perspectives on ethics. A Year 12 lesson was also seen where teaching was good but achievement was very good as students started from a very low baseline and made rapid progress in their understanding of "emotivism". Standards, both in work seen and in class for Years 12 and 13 were above what might be expected at this stage of their course. They reflect the very positive results gained in the 2003 examinations.

### **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well because of consistently very good teaching.
- Specialist teachers and the library provide very good support for learning.
- Individual coursework develops students' independent research skills very well.
- Very good leadership and management underpin achievement.

- Assessment and marking procedures could be improved.

### **Commentary**

201. All GCE A-level candidates have achieved pass grades in the last three years although the proportion achieving A and B grades has fluctuated. In 2003 overall results were average.
202. Standards in work seen are above average. This reflects very good achievement as the subject is attracting increasing numbers whose overall attainment on entry is below average. The majority of students' files reveal well organised, annotated and highlighted work, good powers of analysis and a clear understanding of differing historical interpretations. There are clear strengths in individual coursework where many students display initiative and enterprise in researching issues such as the extent to which the British establishment "turned a blind eye" to events in Northern Ireland before 1969. Literacy standards are above average and higher-attaining students reveal a mastery of language in cogent argument well supported by illustrative quotations. Lower-attaining students' understanding of subject specific terminology and grasp of political concepts is less secure and their written work is prone to errors. A very significant contribution to the standards achieved comes from students' very good and often excellent attitudes. They clearly enjoy the subject and discuss enthusiastically which enables them to explore, test and refine their understanding very well.
203. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. Teachers' excellent subject expertise and insight into how learning takes place, is skilfully used to maximise achievement. Question and answer is very effectively targeted in class discussion to probe and extend students' understanding. Candidates are very well prepared for examinations through shared mark schemes, regularly practising past questions and very clear guidance on source evaluation skills. Teachers often comment extensively on essays, but there is scope for more thorough monitoring of students' notes and assignments in order to correct misunderstandings and occasional errors and offer clearer advice on improvement. Students are highly appreciative of the support offered by the library and by staff financing of texts for individual coursework.
204. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department is an admirable role model and has fostered the openness and close collaborative working relations, which are a strong feature of the department. The recently conducted review has afforded her a clear and accurate appreciation of development priorities that are already being addressed. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

### **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **good**.

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

- The very good teaching and learning are underpinned by strong subject knowledge and high expectations of all students.
- Students have outstandingly good attitudes to the subject and enjoy high quality relationships – between themselves and with teachers.
- Good leadership and management provides a clear educational direction for the subject and is supported by a clear and rigorous self-review of the department's strengths and weaknesses.
- Monitoring of students' progress and achievement is not sufficiently effective.
- Greater levels of challenge are needed to help more students gain the highest possible grades.

### **Commentary**

205. This is a good department that serves its many students well. Standards are generally above average. In GCE AS level standards over the years are usually above average. At GCE A-level,

however, standards are above or well above average. An analysis of results shows that insufficient students gain the higher A-B grades. Work seen in class suggests that currently standards are already above average in both Years 12 and 13. Consistent challenge and effective target setting are needed if all students are to reach the highest grades of which they are capable.

206. Students generally have a good grasp of key concepts and can use their knowledge and understanding to support their responses in essays and detailed assignments. Literacy is good and most students use language well. Their writing has style and linguistic sophistication so that students can present clear and well-constructed arguments or hypotheses. Technical terminology is used accurately and in appropriate contexts. Number is used sensitively and with understanding while ICT supports research and extends learning.
207. Students achieve well. They learn effectively and quickly become competent in their level of understanding of, for example, psychology, empirical methodology, the developmental theory of Piaget or in using examination board criteria to assess their own work and that of their peers.
208. The quality of teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is never less than good. It has high expectations of all students, is well planned and underpinned by teachers' very good subject knowledge. Learning tasks are well designed to enable students to explore learning and gain secure understanding of the topic being studied. Student involvement in learning is expected and a range of teaching methods is used, including practical work and keen analysis of empirical studies. The strategic use of question and answer sessions allows students to answer as well as to clarify their level of understanding. Learners often challenge each other, as well as their teacher. The exciting cut and thrust of these exchanges shows that students have a real ability to draw on previous, as well as current, learning in both supporting and disputing the well-founded arguments or assertions of others. Outstanding relationships ensure that classroom protocols are of the highest order and that work in pairs and small groups is always highly productive. Teachers often use individual and small group teaching as a means of providing additional challenges and to monitor standards during group work. Work is regularly marked. Marking includes detailed comment to identify what is good, as well as to help students to understand what needs to be done to improve both the standard and quality of their assignment.
209. Leadership and management are good. The head of subject has been in post only a short time, but already a self-evaluation has been undertaken and significant priorities have been identified for further development. Mutual lesson observation and scrutiny of students' work is undertaken but is not yet sufficiently systematic or rigorous enough to contribute to detailed monitoring of students' progress or to good quality performance management. There was no provision for this subject at the time of the last inspection.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examination results were above average in 2003.
- Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and some have relevant industrial experience which has a positive impact on students' learning.
- Teachers' very good relationships with students engender very good motivation.
- Good use is made of computer aided design and manufacture in some of the courses.
- There is insufficient monitoring of student progress in graphics and resistant materials courses.

## Commentary

210. GCE AS and A-level examination results in 2003 were above average. The standard of current work of both GCE AS and A-level students is above average. Taking account of the students' previous attainment in design and technology, this represents good achievement.
211. Students produce high quality work in textiles technology and in electronic products. In the latter they also make very good use of information and communication technology. In graphic products students have skills that enable them to produce good quality three-dimensional models. In food technology very good use is made of experimental work to develop new products. Students have a good understanding of the stages in the design process and some are beginning to develop good skills in the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment.
212. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good and excellent teaching and consequent high levels of learning. Students' learning benefits from being taught by teachers who have very good subject knowledge and understanding of course requirements. Very good relationships between teachers and students engender very good motivation. However, there is insufficient periodic monitoring of students' progress in the graphics and resistant materials courses, with the result that some students are not making sufficient progress.
213. Leadership and management are good. There are high levels of mutual support between teachers, which contributes to students' good progress. The curriculum is very good, as it offers five design and technology options, an improvement since the last inspection. However, there is no provision for vocational courses. Students' learning benefits from good industrial links.
214. The higher than average examination results have been maintained since the last inspection. Facilities for ICT, computer aided design and manufacture, have been much improved since then. Overall improvement is good.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

215. The focus of the inspection in this area was on drama as well as on music and music technology. Work in art and design and dance as also sampled.
216. Since 1999, examination results in **art and design** have varied from below to above the national average. In 2003, most students did not reach expected standards. Work seen shows that the current Year 12 and 13 students are working at above average levels. The work of lower attaining students in Year 13, retaking the GCE AS level, is below average. Students' responses to themes include the skilful use of pencil, pastels and all types of paint, with some stunning portraits by one student and effective studies of horses by another. Year 12 students use a wider variety of media to create sculpture inspired by their study of architecture. Work journals are used effectively; they contain lively examples of work from observation and experimentation. All students are achieving as expected. When taught by more than one teacher, higher attaining students in Years 12 and 13 benefit from a variety of artistic views and perspectives. However, lower attaining students who lack confidence find conflicting advice confusing. Students have very good attitudes to learning.
217. One lesson of **dance** was seen. Year 13 students were very well taught and achieved highly in refining their already well developed dance sequences.

## Drama

Two courses were inspected: GCE drama and theatre arts and AVCE performing arts - the latter being a relatively new vocational course.

Provision in drama is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in examinations are above average at GCE AS level and well above average at GCE A-level; standards of work seen in both courses are above average.
- Teaching is often energetic, lively and imaginative and enables students to make rapid progress and produce some excellent performance work.
- The quality of relationships, between students and with their teachers, is outstanding and commitment to work is high.
- Sometimes in performing arts teachers' expectations of their students are insufficiently high.
- Leadership and management are very good and subject knowledge is very good.

### **Commentary**

218. Over recent years, results in drama and theatre arts at GCE AS level have significantly improved to being above average. In GCE A-level a similar improvement has taken place with nearly all students gaining grades in the A-C range in the most recent examinations. In both cases, improved standards are the result of very good teaching that is informed by teachers' very good subject knowledge. There are not yet any examination results from the new AVCE course.
219. Current standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Students show good knowledge and understanding and are gaining high levels of skill as they explore aspects of the course. In the performing arts course, dance, music and drama teachers work closely so that their work blends logically and students experience a wide range of learning styles. Students appreciate the different experiences they encounter throughout the course. Their showcase of work indicates their ability to choose suitable songs and perform well and to perform monologues and duologues with conviction. Students also develop and improve their confidence and ability to sing and use movement to dramatic effect.
220. In drama, the teacher's excellent, humorous relationship with students keeps them fully engaged and creates a relaxed and trusting atmosphere in which risks and challenges can take place, helping them to sustain their attitudes to work and performance. Individual units of work are assessed thoroughly and students are aware of how they can improve. Students are able to work independently, to rehearse, devise and prepare for performance. Video evidence of performances demonstrates their very good physical, vocal and performance skills combined with high tension and very good characterisation. Their performances are very well supported with sound, lighting and special effects. The theatre technician makes a very positive impact on this work.
221. Students on both courses have a high commitment to their work, appreciate the critical analysis of their work and, as a result, produce a considered and improved response that takes account of peer and teacher comment.
222. The quality of teaching is very good in drama and theatre arts and good in performing arts. Innovative teaching ensures that students gain knowledge and understanding and achieve very well. For example, in a Year 12 drama lesson that was very well taught, the teacher directed students in a performance of *The Trial*, by Kafka. Using neutral white-faced masks students developed their physical responses to the text. This not only produced improved physical work but also clearly demonstrated how the director can guide actors to communicate a complex theme to a contemporary audience. In performing arts, the expectations of students are sometimes too low and this limits their achievement.
223. In most cases clear feedback is given to students about the standard and quality of their work. In some aspects of performing arts this is not always the case. Students work independently

on more than one unit of work at a time and are able to document the units of work they undertake. They work well together and are a strong and supportive group. However, they are not all entirely clear as to how they can improve their practical work to increase their grades.

224. Leadership and management are very good and are especially strong in drama and theatre arts. The energy and commitment of the head of department are significant factors in the department's success. The team of teachers work well together and are well managed. The courses are well resourced. Accommodation is very good; it is flexible and enables a range of activities as well as teaching and learning activities to be used successfully.
225. Improvement since the last inspection is good. There has been considerable improvement in standards, provision, resources and accommodation. The current provision makes a significant contribution to the school's performing arts college status.

## **Music**

Provision in music and music technology is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good; aspects of music technology teaching are excellent.
- Students achieve very well and make very good progress.
- Very large numbers of students study both music and music technology.

### **Commentary**

226. In the most recent GCE AS and A-level music examinations, most students gained their predicted grades, which were broadly in line with average. Staffing difficulties in music technology resulted in some of the more able students not gaining their predicted grades.
227. In work seen during the inspection, standards on both courses were well above average and students are currently achieving very well. GCE AS level music students have high practical standards, are perceptive score readers and have a good perspective of the development of music in history. The composition skills of some are of the very highest order. AS music technology students have not all taken GCSE music, but have advanced technology skills that enable them to be successful with the demands of the course. All have secure knowledge of instrumentation and acoustics and are competent with advanced recording techniques. GCE A-level music students have a good understanding of chorale harmonisation and analyse scores accurately. Those students in the second year of music technology use computer programs sensitively and creatively for composition, using carefully planned textures with great authority. Evidence suggests that most students in Years 12 and 13 should gain good results at the end of their course.
228. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and deliver a high level of challenge. Very informative worksheets are produced and much personal advice is given to individual students. This enables students of all abilities to make very good progress and achieve very well. There are many excellent features of the way music technology is taught by the teacher, who is a composer in his own right. The students have excellent attitudes to their studies, as reflected in many working privately in a very focused way in the practice rooms and technology studio from first thing in the morning until late afternoon, every day of the week. The sixth form students are very good role models to younger students, with male and female students being equally committed and involved. This is partly why the music suite is permanently alive with so much activity by students of all ages.
229. Leadership and management are excellent. The music and music technology courses are successful and attract students from other schools into this sixth form. The members of the

department provide very high quality curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities for these very fortunate students. The music department continues to bring considerable prestige to the reputation of the school.

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

### **Leisure and recreation**

Provision in leisure and tourism is **satisfactory**.

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

- Results in 2003 were above average.
- Teaching, learning and students' current achievement are satisfactory.
- Assessment is well focused on performance criteria.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is irregular and insufficiently rigorous.
- Course leadership is sound with a clear plan for action.
- There is insufficient emphasis on the basic skills.

#### **Commentary**

230. Standards of attainment are above average. In 2003 of the 13 students in Year 12 taking intermediate level GNVQ leisure and tourism, half gained pass grades and half attained merits; none reached distinction level. AVCE leisure and recreation results for pass grades were above average with a third of the 11 students attaining higher grades. Results were better than in previous years.
231. Standards in work seen and in lessons, are satisfactory for students in Years 12 and 13 studying for single and double award AVCE leisure and recreation. No lessons were seen for students following the GNVQ intermediate course as all students were out of school on work experience during the inspection. Samples of work show that standards in written work are well below average. Class folders show poor standards of written communication and some lack of care over presentation. Standards in the use of ICT are low.
232. Students begin their GNVQ course with modest GCSE results. They achieve well in practical work at the Bedford Tourist Information Centre, but their achievement, where written work is required, is unsatisfactory. AVCE students all have high levels of attainment at GCSE on entry to the AVCE course. They go on to attain good results in single and double award AVCE. This represents sound achievement for all students.
233. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are fully planned and include some variety in activities. Students are encouraged to think for themselves but some lessons are too dominated by the teacher and this restricts opportunities for them to expand their ideas. Students generally work productively from very relevant learning materials matched to the demands of the course. Students with special educational needs have good individual support from the teacher. In one lesson where teaching was poor time was wasted and there was a lack of challenge. Because expectations were much too low the tasks set were not at a high enough level for AVCE students and they did not learn enough. Students' progress had not been adequately monitored and assessment tasks had not been completed by a significant minority of students. There was a lack of rigour and the homework assignment was undemanding.
234. Generally there is sound focus on the requirements of the course and the syllabus content is covered adequately. However, there is insufficient focus on the key skills. Numeracy opportunities are not well integrated into the courses and opportunities for the planned use and development of numeracy in each topic are insufficient. Communication skills are satisfactory to enable course requirements to be met. Lower attaining students, however, exhibit weak



spelling and this is not always corrected. Higher attaining students employ high-level communication skills and this raises the standard of their attainment. Apart from the use of ICT for word processing there is little evidence of the use of computers to raise the quality and standard of work. One lower attaining student had used no ICT in a complete unit of work. Internet research is used to access relevant information. The use of ICT is insufficient largely because of the lack of access to computers for vocational subjects.

235. There is sound leadership and clear direction with a good action plan to inform development. Assessment is a strong feature; it is thorough and soundly based in examination board criteria. GNVQ students need greater support to interpret assessment criteria. Management is unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in the monitoring of teaching and learning. This is particularly important with the changes in the teaching team and staff working outside their specialist areas. Course leaders are aware of the need for further training for teachers new to these subjects. Teaching group sizes are falling; retention rates are carefully monitored. Most pupils complete the course and are satisfied with their courses.
236. Standards in leisure and tourism and leisure and recreation were not reported at the previous inspection. Gender issues noted in vocational courses are no longer evident. Weaknesses in basic skills still constrain students' ability to meet course requirements, especially in intermediate GNVQ. There has been satisfactory improvement in standards over the past three years.

## **BUSINESS**

The inspection focus in this area is on business education. However, work in economics was also sampled. In the two GCE A-level economics lessons seen teaching and learning was good. The clear teaching of a well-prepared Year 13 lesson ensured students were able to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the new European common agricultural policy. In a Year 12 lesson to introduce the concept of "balance of payments", students worked productively in response to the teacher's very good support, guidance and stimulating materials. As a result students were able to define and manipulate the various component flows that comprise the account. In both lessons the very good teacher-student relationships ensured a pleasant and productive working environment.

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Current students are making good progress in lessons and are achieving well.
- Leadership and management are good; a clear educational vision is provided.
- Three well-qualified subject specialists teach the business courses.
- Teaching and learning are good and enhanced by very good student-teacher relationships.
- Assessment and marking of work is thorough and accurate but does not include enough feedback to students on how to improve the standard and quality of their assignments.
- There is insufficient accommodation that offers an appropriate learning environment.

### **Commentary**

237. Students have achieved well in the business GCE A-level course and all invariably gain at least a pass grade in the final examination. In 2003, the 15 students entered did well. Over half of the students gained an A or B grade; this is significantly above the national average. This is a great improvement on recent years where results have been around the national average. The achievement of current Year 13 students shows evidence of similar high standards to those reached last year. Students have a sound grasp of relevant business terminology, including that used in marketing, finance and human resources. These students are the last to be

entered for this course; the department is in the process of changing to the advanced VCE. Nine of the 11 students who completed the six AVCE units in 2003 passed, with two gaining the top grades. Current students are achieving well and are able to apply concepts such as the marketing mix, human resource functions and business law to relevant business scenarios.

238. Teaching and learning are good, with very good student-teacher relationships creating a pleasant and productive learning environment. In a very good Year 12 marketing lesson, the enthusiastic and very well prepared teacher engaged students with targeted questions ensuring that they understood the concept of product differentiation and how businesses exploit niche markets. In a Year 13 business law lesson where teaching was good, the teacher's carefully prepared scenarios ensured understanding of the impact of key concepts such as 'duty of care' and 'breach of duty' in legal cases. In a few lessons where teaching was less good, clear, measurable learning outcomes, shared with students, were lacking.
239. The department has an effective system for monitoring and assessing students' work and providing feedback on written assignments. However, feedback does not always include sufficient details on what students need to do to improve.
240. The business area is well led and the difficult curriculum transition is being well managed. The newly qualified teacher has been effectively integrated into the business team creating a pool of expertise. Students value the access they have to this effective teaching team. Some lessons are not conducted in the main business area, so students are not always working in an appropriate business environment within easy access of relevant materials. However, students have good access to computers, which is necessary for the completion of the advanced VCE assignment work. They appreciate the access that they have to staff to discuss their work. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

### **Health and social care**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching helps students gain satisfactory results, which are improving.
- Year 12 GNVQ and AVCE students show very good attitudes to their work.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The timetable structure limits students' use of work placements to enrich learning.
- Students' use of ICT is limited.

### **Commentary**

241. Results in 2003 for the AVCE examination (single and double award) were below average for grades A and B but all students passed. Results improved in 2003, reversing a declining trend. GNVQ results in 2003 for the small group were in line with national averages, as in previous years.
242. Inspection evidence in lessons and work shows standards attained by current students are satisfactory in relation to course expectations and students of a fairly wide range of ability show satisfactory achievement. Year 12 GNVQ students have good knowledge of hazards in the workplace but not all are fully aware of current laws protecting employees. Students learn effectively about job roles through a two-week work placement, which coincided with the inspection. Year 13 AVCE students displayed above average skills when evaluating the effectiveness of communications but had limited knowledge of scientific terms relating to the spread of disease and there were no written reports of visits to local care settings. Students

use ICT well to present word-processed reports but seldom analyse health statistics using spreadsheets.

243. Teaching and learning are good, so that students develop good and in Year 12 very good, attitudes to their work. Teachers and students have very good working relationships. Lessons are generally interesting and well matched to students' needs, although some AVCE tasks involve too much writing and not enough practical observation in care settings. GNVQ students have useful fortnightly visits to care settings. Teachers' relevant examples in class include topical anecdotes, on which students are encouraged to offer opinions. Work is marked regularly for the most part and students are given detailed checklists and relevant targets to help them improve.
244. Curriculum leadership and management of the subject are good; the experienced staff work as an enthusiastic, well-knit team. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection. Points for further development include: more use of ICT by students in lessons to help develop literacy and numeracy skills; and, given more flexible timetabling, the use of regular work placements for AVCE students.

### **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

245. It was not possible to observe teaching and learning in the weekly guidance programme as this fell outside the inspection. Other work in supporting and advising students is evaluated in section 6 of the report.

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

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

