

INSPECTION REPORT

BURNHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Burnham, Slough

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110493

Headteacher: Mrs Cathrine Long

Lead inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson

Dates of inspection: 24th - 27th November 2003

Inspection number: 259311

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11 - 19
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 910

School address: Hogfair Lane
Burnham
Slough
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Telephone number: (01628) 604 812
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mrs Sally Eaton

Date of previous inspection: 11th May 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Burnham Grammar School is an average-sized 11-19 secondary school, whose intake is largely selected at the age of 11+ by tests administered within its two main contributory LEAs, Buckinghamshire and Slough. There are 910 students on roll, of whom 240 are in the sixth form. Most students stay on in the sixth form, joined by a small number from elsewhere who succeed in offering an appropriate range of GCSE successes, with the result that the ability range of the sixth form is typical of most grammar schools. The overall attainment of students on entry at the age of 11 is above average but covers a wider spectrum of attainment than is often the case in selective schools. About 30 per cent of these students are average in their attainment on entry to the school, so below the attainment of many grammar school students, though none achieved less than the national expectation in their tests at the end of primary school. Only one student (in the sixth form) has a statement of special educational need, and this is for visual impairment. The proportion of students taking up a free school meal is very low, but slightly above average for students at grammar schools as, although most come from homes with better than average income levels and access to further or higher education, a minority of students come from homes without these benefits. There is a significant minority of students speaking a language other than English at home, but none of these is at an early stage of acquiring English. The largest single minority ethnic group in the school is of Indian heritage.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1038	Mrs Sylvia Richardson	Lead inspector	Educational inclusion
9561	Mr Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector	
12121	Mr Jack Mallinson	Team inspector	English, literacy and drama
3643	Mr Derek Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics and numeracy
23188	Mrs Jennifer Maunder	Team inspector	Science and biology in the sixth form
24453	Mr Gordon Jackson	Team inspector	Physics in the sixth form
13067	Mr Alan Quinn	Team inspector	Chemistry in the sixth form
4615	Mr Michael Bostock	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
8632	Mr Derrick Beer	Team inspector	Geography
30114	Mrs Ann Kenward	Team inspector	Geography in the sixth form
1085	Mr John Laver	Team inspector	History
31687	Mrs Helen Singh	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
1782	Mr Andrew Lyons	Team inspector	Design and technology
10782	Mr Henry Moreton	Team inspector	Media studies and citizenship
31688	Mr Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design
23030	Ms Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
15304	Mr Reg Fletcher	Team inspector	Music
15485	Mr Robert Butler	Team inspector	Religious education
28199	Mr Peter Lawley	Team inspector	Psychology
2480	Mrs Christine Gilder	Team inspector	Special educational needs
16042	Mrs Paula Haes	Team inspector	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Burnham Grammar School offers a good education, with features that are satisfactory and some that are very good. It is not a typical grammar school because of its broader than average attainment on entry. Leadership is good overall; the headteacher provides a clear vision for the future of the school and has created an ethos in which pupils are encouraged to do well. Results in national tests and examinations are very good. Students' high motivation, concentration and hard work, and much good and very good teaching, combine to achieve these results. Parents' support for their children's education through out-of-class learning is a significant aid to students' achievement.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results in national tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Results in AS and A-level are above average.
- Teaching is good overall.
- There are very good standards of work in English literature, music and religious education by the end of Year 11 and in physics in the sixth form. Provision in physical education in the sixth form is excellent.
- Although standards in English are well above the national average, teachers do not sufficiently challenge all pupils to achieve more. In other lessons, such as in science, students with high attainment make slower progress than they might if they were challenged more and given opportunities to learn by using research and investigation.
- Standards and teaching and learning in biology in the sixth form are below what students could be expected to attain and achievement is unsatisfactory.
- There is insufficient early action to identify and meet some pupils' special learning needs, and recording their progress is unsatisfactory.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in 1998 in the provision for Years 7 to 11, and satisfactory progress in the sixth form. Standards have been maintained at a well above average level in most subjects. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved considerably, but not all departments take advantage of the facilities and ICT is not used enough to support subject teaching.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' results are **very good** overall when compared with the national averages in tests and examinations at the ages of 14 and 16. They are good by the end of the sixth form. Targets have generally been met in all key stages and the trends overall have been upwards. However, the school is compared, somewhat unfairly, with schools with a more narrowly selective intake, and this makes standards at Burnham appear low; this effect is largely explained by its wider spread of ability on intake. Some of the explanation, however, lies in a lack of challenge for the highest attaining pupils, for example, in science and English. Standards of Year 9 pupils are well above average in national tests. Over the past five years, standards have been maintained at this level. GCSE results continue to be well above average in comparison with all schools nationally, but are below the average of schools deemed to have similar intakes. There is a high proportion of A* and A grades in business studies, combined science, design and technology, English literature, history, information and communication technology, mathematics and physical education. In the sixth form, standards are above average, but fell somewhat in 2003. Pupils from ethnic minority heritages achieve as well as their peers. Boys attain slightly higher standards than girls, though both are above average.

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

Key: A* - Very high; 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' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very well developed. Behaviour is very good. The school has very good provision for students' social and moral development. Relationships are very good and focus on learning and becoming good citizens. Attendance is satisfactory in the main school. In the sixth form, systems for recording students' attendance are unsatisfactory, with the result that overall figures show unsatisfactory levels of attendance.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Teaching is good overall. In general, it ensures that students learn well. Students' good achievement is also due to their respect for each other and the mature work habits they develop from an early stage. This significantly contributes towards their academic success. **The curriculum in the main school is satisfactory**, with good provision in physical education, history and modern foreign languages. Provision for students with English as an additional language and for those with special educational needs is satisfactory, though tracking of their progress is unsatisfactory. The school lacks systems to ensure accurately that students' special educational needs are met. **Care of students is good.** Advice and guidance about options and careers are good. **Partnerships with parents, the school and the community are good.** Reporting of students' progress is detailed, although it lacks guidance in some cases on how to improve. Parents and the community support the school's objectives well, particularly showing interest and support in developing work beyond the classroom and supporting students in their completion of homework and coursework.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher's top priority is high attainment and she plans well to achieve this. Her leadership is clear and direct. She is well supported by an able group of senior managers, who understand and devise management systems to undertake necessary change. Subject leadership varies from very good in design and technology, physical education, history and religious education to satisfactory in English and science. Governors provide satisfactory oversight and have ensured that statutory requirements are fully in place, although some teachers still do not fulfil the governors' requirement for an act of worship during tutor time, when there is no assembly for their groups of pupils. The school seeks to obtain best value in its budgeting, but it has developed a large deficit in the last 12 months, despite considerable efforts to save money by restructuring provision more cost-effectively. The plan to return to a balanced budget is robust and in the light of the very good attainment, despite the deficit, value for money is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally satisfied with the work of the school, although they would like more consistency in setting and marking homework. They appreciate the school's systems of reporting but some would like more information about their child's progress and continued improvements in communications between school and home, although, in the view of the inspectors, this is satisfactory. Students are generally satisfied with the provision made for them by the school. The areas in which they have concerns are behaviour and the school's response to their views, although inspectors found this too to be at least satisfactory.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The school should improve all teaching and learning to the standards of the best, providing a systematic approach to challenge and high expectations for all, and give more opportunities for independent thought, research and discussion. It should track attendance in the sixth form better and should continue to involve increasingly more staff in the provision of a daily collective act of worship for all pupils. Better use of ICT and further development of students' skills in ICT by subject teachers is also a need.

THE SIXTH FORM AT BURNHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students attain standards that are generally above the national average, and in some subjects, well above.
- Teaching and learning in physics, design and technology and in physical education is very good with examples of excellence.
- Teaching of biology is unsatisfactory.
- Attendance in Year 12 is unsatisfactory.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision for English is satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress, achieving standards in line with expectations. Results in literature are very good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Mathematics	Provision for mathematics is satisfactory . Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve satisfactorily.
Science	Provision for physics is very good , for chemistry is good , but for biology, it is unsatisfactory . Teachers' well-planned approach to developing students' skills in and understanding of chemistry and physics helps them to learn how to use complex key concepts.
Information and communication technology	Provision is good . The teaching is consistently good. Current standards are above the national average. Achievement is good.
Humanities	Provision for geography and history is good . Standards are above average and these very well motivated students respond well to good teaching. Provision for psychology is good . Standards have risen and good, well-planned teaching supports independent thought and enquiry, leading to good achievement.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision for art and design is satisfactory . Teachers create regular opportunities for students to discuss their work with others in the group, enhancing their achievement. Students are encouraged to work independently at home and in the art studio. Provision for media studies is good . Teaching is good and develops independent thought and enquiry. Achievement is consequently good.
Business studies	Provision is good . Students achieve well, with most progressing from AS on to A-level. The quality of teaching and learning is good.
Technological education	Provision for design and technology (graphic products) is very good because teaching is very good, and it results in improving standards that are now high through very good and appropriate learning.
Physical education	Provision is excellent . Students respond enthusiastically to the excellent range of opportunities available and achieve high standards.
General education	Provision for 'Critical Thinking Skills' is good , as it links well into students' other studies and, although only recently introduced and therefore untested in the longer term, is helping them to structure their thinking and produce better argued written work.

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

Curriculum provision is **satisfactory**. It meets the needs of students who wish to follow an academic curriculum. Parents are happy with the range of studies available to their children in the sixth form. Advice, guidance and support for sixth formers are good. They have very good relationships with their teachers and tutors, which help them to get a good start to their chosen courses.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is well led. The character of the sixth form is well defined and there is a clear vision for its future development, providing academic preparation for further study. Management of the sixth form is good, with the exception of monitoring sixth form attendance, which is unsatisfactory.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students appreciate very much the opportunities created to work independently and carry out research to aid their learning. They believe that courses available are well suited to their needs. Although a relatively large minority of students expressed in writing their concern about access to and quality of guidance, in interview this did not emerge as a major issue and many students were complimentary about the guidance they had received.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

As this is a school with relatively small year groups, results at GCSE can be adversely or positively affected by minor variations in the performance of a few individuals. This adds to the complexity inherent in making reliable comparisons with other selective schools, where the attainment on entry is more narrowly focused than at Burnham. Judgements are therefore made by reviewing examination performance, written work, watching students' progress in lessons and speaking to them about their work. The shift upwards in attainment on entry, which will make the school into a more typical grammar school if continued, is evident through analysis of the current Years 7 and 8. It has therefore not yet had an effect on the school's results.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain standards in most subjects that are well above the national average. Their achievement, which represents good progress, is enhanced by their ability to write well.
- English, literacy and mathematical skills are very well developed, and students' ability to speak and read is good overall.
- Results are well below the average of the schools with which Burnham is compared, but this does not fairly reflect the students' achievement or the value added by the school to students' performance at the age of 11.
- Standards in mathematics are well above average at the end of Year 11, and above average in the sixth form. Overall achievement in mathematics is good in the main school, but only average in the sixth form.
- Performance in science is well above average in the dual award course, but there is variability between the sciences and standards in science are not as high as they should be. There is clear identification of students who are gifted and talented, but provision for them does not systematically enable all of them to achieve as well as they should.
- The progress made by students identified as lower attaining by the school is good, but the tracking of their progress to assist them more is unsatisfactory.
- Teachers' subject expertise enhances students' efforts to achieve well, as they learn well from clear, well-informed and often scholarly explanation.
- There is insufficient application of ICT in subjects to enable all students to enhance their skills and reach high standards.

Commentary

1. The National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above national averages. However, whilst very good averages have been maintained since the time of the last inspection, the trend of improvement in test results has been below the national trend of improvement. English results in particular had dipped year on year for the previous three years, but they improved in 2003. Science has been variable, although the overall trend has been upwards. Standards are well above average in science by Year 9 and by Year 11, though the rate of progress is too slow when judged against their attainment on entry, particularly in the case of higher attaining pupils. Mathematics has been consistently the highest performing of the three core subjects at the age of 14.
2. Teachers' assessments of attainment in other subjects at the end of Year 9 show that pupils consistently perform well above the national average in history, geography, design and technology, art and physical education. However, performance in 2003 was significantly weaker in ICT, languages and music.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	40 (39)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	44.8 (42.5)	35.4 (34.7)
science	40.2 (39.7)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 129 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Since the last inspection, the GCSE examination results improved steadily at a rate that was faster than the national rate of improvement. There has been a very consistent upward trend in results in the GCSE examinations, with school targets in 2002 being exceeded by three per cent. In 2003, 94 per cent of students gained five or more higher grade passes at GCSE, although the school missed its target by one per cent. Boys achieved very highly.
- GCSE results were well above average in art and design, business studies, combined science, design and technology, English literature, French, geography, history, ICT, mathematics and sports studies. Results were average in comparison with all schools in biology, chemistry and German. There is considerable variation in the number of students who gain A* and A grades in GCSE, with a very high proportion gaining A* in English literature, and very good performance at this level in geography. Some subjects, however, achieve few A* and A grades, and this is particularly so with art and design, German and Spanish and Food Technology. English language and ICT also achieve fewer A* than might be expected of a selective intake. Results in English literature, mathematics and dual award science were well above average. There is also particular strength overall in some subjects with smaller entries, for example, business studies, geography and sports studies. Amongst the highest achieving groups in the school are students from ethnic minority heritages, especially those from India.

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	94 (97)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	49.4 (34.7)	49.5 (34.7)

There were 149 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Achievement, a measure of how well pupils do in the light of their capability, overall is satisfactory. Some students, identified as higher attaining or gifted and talented, could have been expected to attain better GCSE results in some of their subjects, with a higher proportion of results in the range of A* and A; this is particularly the case in English language and science. However, teachers in many subjects plan well to meet their needs, and this is reflected in their results.
- Students who arrive at the school with relatively low attainment achieve well, and very few fail to attain five or more good grades at GCSE. The achievements of students aged 11-16 with additional learning needs are satisfactory. The only post-16 student with a statement has just started in the sixth form. The school has a well-established range of support systems to enhance the progress of all students whom they identify as under-achieving or whose behaviour or attitude gives cause for concern. A small number of students with specific learning difficulties receive support from an experienced learning support teacher. Those whose behaviour places them at risk of exclusion receive support from the Pupil Referral Unit outreach specialist. The students who receive this extra help value it and expect to complete their examination courses. They believe their progress is improving as a result. Those who need extra time receive it.

- It is not possible to make secure judgements about these students' progress over time for two reasons. The school's record-keeping system does not provide a clear profile of students' achievement year-on-year, as only recent academic reports are filed. Until spring 2002, there was little diagnostic work done to pinpoint the nature of the difficulties contributing to underachievement. Appropriate interventions have only been in place since then, when extra support for students with specific learning difficulties was made available. Individual Education Plans for students were started at the same time, but these are unsatisfactory as they do not have clear targets to provide students with constructive guidance on how to succeed or focus and shape teachers' planning to meet their needs.

Sixth form

- Most students move from Year 11 into the sixth form, as they have attained the above average GCSE results that afford them entry. A few students enter from other schools: their places are now assured by achieving 56 GCSE points, an increased requirement dating from 2003, but this higher attaining group has not yet reached the end of their courses and influenced the school's results overall. However, this means that the profile of the sixth form's level of attainment on entry is much more like that of a typical grammar school.
- The A-level results in 2002 were above average, but not well above, as GCSE results had been for this group of students. Despite an overall drop in the pass rate, results remained just above the national average, though they were in line with the national picture at the higher A and B grades. The above average standards identified in the last inspection report have generally been maintained.

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	91.9 (95.8)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	35.3 (37.3)	36.1(35.5)
Average point score per pupil	297.2 (307.1)	253.1 (254.5)

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

- Comparisons with grammar schools are not available, but the 2003 results represented a slightly lowered performance in comparison with previous years, However, when an analysis is made of students' achievements using their points score, towards which national figures are moving, the results in 2003 were still clearly above average.
- Results at A-level in English literature, mathematics, physics, ICT, media, sports studies and history were well above average in 2003. Business education, art at AS level, chemistry, design and technology and geography were above average. Chemistry, art and psychology were average. Results in biology were in line with national averages overall but few students obtained the higher A and B grades.
- Standards in lessons seen were generally at least in line with the requirements of each course. In work seen, much exceeded basic requirements, with the result that students were achieving well or very well. Generally, presentation of work, including spelling and grammar, was satisfactory and there was little difference in this aspect of students' written work between the boys and the girls.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and values are very good. Behaviour is very good and exclusions are rare. Older students help both younger students in this school and visit primary schools, run taster days for visiting Year 6 pupils and undertake a range of other responsibilities, including active participation in

a school council. Their commitment to activities that enhance the learning of others is a measure of their personal qualities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- Attendance is just above average in Years 7 to 11.
- Students from ethnic minority heritages are well integrated into the school and there are many friendships that cross cultural boundaries.
- Pupils respond very well to opportunities to learn and take responsibility.
- Pupils develop responsive attitudes towards others and relationships are very good.
- Pupils develop well morally and socially – their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.

Commentary

13. The vast majority of students show very good interest in the work of the school and this is evident across activities and throughout the different age and ability groups. Students, including those with specific educational needs or circumstances, generally respond very positively to the tasks and challenges presented by the teachers. In good lessons, students remain on task and work cooperatively, sharing resources and ideas. They take responsibility for thinking problems through for themselves, both in lessons and in outside lesson activities. However, there is a very small minority of pupils who do not show such positive qualities. Their level of motivation, interest and effort is not high, especially in weaker lessons. Students' participation in extra-curricular activities is generally very good.
14. In some areas of the curriculum such as religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE), students reflect on beliefs, feelings and nature but this is not so across the curriculum. Students develop their personalities and appropriate ways to react when frustrated or angered through the personal, social and health education programmes, which include moral issues and provide good opportunities for pupils to gain awareness of themselves and of society. Pupils have a very good understanding of the difference between right and wrong, even if a small minority do not act accordingly.
15. In lessons, behaviour is generally very good, particularly when the activities engage students well and where teachers effectively manage any disruptions. Behaviour around school is generally very good. No evidence of aggressive behaviour was seen during the period of inspection. Anti-social behaviour, including bullying, is not a significant problem.
16. Students co-operate well with their teachers and, in group work, amongst each other in lessons, in the rich extra-curricular activities, including charity fund raising, and show the qualities this develops through many opportunities, including the prefect system, where they can show responsibility and be creative and thoughtful. A productive competitiveness and pride in each other's achievements, such as in sport, emerges from all these opportunities. Students form very constructive relationships with each other and with adults. In the school council, students develop their understanding of democratic processes and their responsibilities.
17. Students show that they appreciate the cultural traditions of others through the curriculum, for example, in art and design, music, physical education and educational trips, which enrich students' cultural experience. However, opportunities to learn about cultures other than their own in multi-cultural Britain are not wide enough for students fully to appreciate their range and diversity. Students are aware of and appreciate the cultural and religious diversity in the school, where all groups work and play together happily, and there are some good examples in lessons where full advantage of diversity is taken.

18. Attendance is a little above the national average. Authorised absences, which are widespread, are mostly due to illness or because of short family holidays during the term times. Although such absences are discouraged, school action has not had as wide an impact as senior staff hoped. Procedures for monitoring and securing good attendance are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11. The absences have no measurable impact on students' achievement because of their academic ability and high level of motivation. Unauthorised absences are negligible. Punctuality is satisfactory.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.6	School data:	0.1
National data:	7.8	National data:	1.1

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	657	14	0
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	19	1	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	2	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	176	9	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	45	1	0
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	14	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	5	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	9	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0

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

19. The number of fixed period exclusions has slightly increased since the last inspection but for justifiable reasons. There were no permanent exclusions during the sample period.

Sixth form

20. Students' moral and social development is very good, reflected well in their attitudes and behaviour, which are also very good. Their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form

- Relationships and the climate for learning are very good.
- In lessons, students participate very well and concentrate on their work.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

21. Nearly all students stay for the full length of their course. Most say that they have continued in the sixth form because they trust staff and relationships are very good. Overall, students' personal development is very good. Students help with organising events, clubs and the house system. They show initiative and concern about local community matters, help young students with their work and are effective prefects. They are respectful in tutor periods, which are valuable corporate occasions, though they do not provide real opportunities for reflection. The system of reviewing progress encourages self-evaluation. Most students are keen to do well, concentrate in lessons and try their best. Their behaviour is very good. Students of all backgrounds work together well, in pairs and larger groups, supporting and learning from each other. A good range of opportunities for students is provided to develop confidence and self-esteem, mostly at school. Extra-curricular activities are relatively few. Sixth form study facilities are good and enable students to develop effective work habits.
22. Year 12 attendance is well below what is expected in the sixth form with too much unauthorised absence. The Year 13 attendance looks very low since students attend only on the days when they have lessons and their attendance is worked out as a proportion of total possible attendance in the school rather than the total possible sessions that they could have attended. Absences in the main the school are widespread, mostly for medical reasons, and have no obvious adverse effect on students' achievement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **good** education for its students. Teaching develops students' motivation and achievement well. Teachers are well qualified and expert in their subjects. There are a few examples of unsatisfactory teaching, and in some cases, feedback to students is insufficiently detailed or challenging to ensure that they focus on self-improvement. The curriculum meets students' academic needs well, although, unusually, in the sixth form, there is no provision or demand for vocationally-based courses, for which students have to transfer to other institutions. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are enriching and extending, challenging students to excel where they can. However, in some aspects of the life of the school, challenge is limited, especially for the highest attaining students. Students are looked after well, and both parents and students are satisfied with what the school provides.

Teaching and learning

Most of the teaching is good and much is very good. A high proportion of the lessons is well taught and students learn well. However, for some gifted and talented students, the degree of challenge is insufficient. This is partly because the range of teaching methods in routine use in some subjects is fairly limited. Some teachers are reluctant to let students experiment or to follow up their class work with rigorous research.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most teaching is good. In a good number of lessons, it is very good and in a few, it is excellent.
- Many teachers bring a high level of subject expertise and scholarship to their work, and students appreciate and benefit from this.
- Teachers' insistence on high standards of behaviour means that all students can get on with their work without interruption.
- Students apply themselves well to their work and they are very productive.
- Subject teaching for students with additional special educational needs is generally good, though specialist support is very limited.
- Written assessment of students' work is infrequent in science, English and ICT in Key Stage 3, and this sometimes contributes to a slower pace in some lessons.

Commentary

23. Students learn well. The main reason for this is that they approach their work with maturity and interest, complete most tasks and follow up their work in class with well-prepared homework. In many classes, teaching is well informed and contributes well to developing students' skills, although in a minority of lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, the level of challenge for some higher attaining students is insufficient, with the result that the range of skills they develop lacks depth and some become demotivated.
24. Teaching is mostly good or very good in mathematics, design and technology, art and design, geography, modern foreign languages, history, media, music, physical education (PE), physics, psychology and religious education. It is also good in English in Years 7 to 9, but only satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in science in Years 7 to 11. There are examples of excellence in teaching in ICT, design and technology, music and PE. There was a small number of examples of unsatisfactory teaching in several subjects, but principally in science and French. The reason that these lessons were unsatisfactory was, in the main, the lack of challenge that allowed some students, generally the most able, to coast.
25. The best teaching provides the foundations upon which students of all levels of attainment can build. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson on the poetry of Yeats, students achieved very well because of very good teaching which enabled them to share their teacher's enthusiasm for the poet, and indeed inspired them. The lesson proceeded at a fast pace which challenged students throughout and provided them with the challenge this high attaining group needed. Students shared the ideas and showed an evident pleasure in learning and deepening their knowledge and understanding of the poet's intentions. It emerged in interviews with students of all ages that they respect the challenge provided by such lessons, accept the work they generate and relish it.
26. Such a level of challenge is evident in a range of subjects, with the same response from the students. A design and technology lesson, for example, taught with the aid of up-to-date ICT, enabled students to reinforce their learning very well, and particular attention through probing questions ensured that the most gifted amongst the students were fully stretched. Many of these very challenging lessons occurred in Years 7 to 9; they were less frequent in Years 10 and 11.
27. Teachers assess students' work satisfactorily overall, but this judgement hides considerable variability. In history, physical education, design and technology, music and ICT, oral feedback is useful in assisting students to improve their work. The lack of challenge referred to before is particularly evident in the feedback given to students in science.
28. In lessons, the provision made in class by teachers for students with additional special educational needs is good overall. Where teachers plan actively to meet these students' needs and match appropriately tasks, support and challenge, the lower attaining students achieve well and play a full part. The opposite is true in the least effective lessons where, on occasion, no effort is made to adapt the activities for the lower attaining students, or check that they understand the task in hand. In these circumstances, several drift off task and become disengaged from the rest of the class. The shortcomings in the provision made for these students mean that the school's promotion of equality of opportunity for these students is at present unsatisfactory.
29. Teaching is generally good in the sixth form, with the exception of biology, where it is unsatisfactory. It is only satisfactory in English and art and design. Much of the sixth form teaching benefits from teachers' high level of scholarship and up-to-date subject knowledge. This emerges very clearly in students' written work, for example, in physical education. Here, suggestions as to sources for further research, lines of development of a theme are clearly indicated and enable students to probe and develop well.

30. In a media studies lesson, very good use of assessment of areas which students had earlier found difficult led to them overcoming difficulties and deepening their knowledge. Their questions and debate contributed to their development of their own resources of moral and spiritual strength, a further benefit of the teaching and learning.

Example of outstanding practice

An ICT lesson promotes very high standards by helping students to make choices about the direction of their work and use simultaneously several advanced software applications.

Year 10 students, using a range of software applications, including the Internet, to design company logos, produced very well researched, developed and evaluated outcomes. These were the result of their fluency in ICT, brought about by good access to computers at home and in school, and high quality teaching. Teaching is technically very knowledgeable and up-to-date and the teacher knows how to combine very good relationships and high expectations of personal success with individual tuition. By probing carefully how students react to the software, teaching causes them to reflect on the effectiveness of their choices and make them more sensitive to continuing self-improvement. Background music during the practical part of the lesson increased concentration and improved the working environment.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 158 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (3%)	35 (22%)	76 (48%)	35 (22%)	8 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

The curriculum

Curriculum provision for students between the ages of 11 and 16 is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a satisfactory curriculum overall, although there is limited provision for drama or a work-related programme of study.
- Provision for careers education and extra-curricular opportunities are good and there are appropriate opportunities for students to experience the world of work.
- ICT is insufficiently used to support learning across the curriculum.
- Split classes adversely affect provision for English.

Commentary

31. There are good opportunities for students to develop knowledge, understanding and an appropriate range of skills, particularly in physical education, history and religious education. Opportunities are also good in modern foreign languages, particularly for younger students, although there are restrictions that prevent some students opting for two languages in Years 10 and 11. Curriculum opportunities in English are sometimes adversely affected by the practice of splitting classes between teachers, which can have a negative impact on students' achievement. Provision for students with English as an additional language is satisfactory. Currently, a small amount of withdrawal occurs which is beneficial to those students.
32. The key supports for students with additional learning needs are not securely in place. Individual education plans in use at present for students receiving external help are inadequate. They do not meet the expectations laid down in the Code of Practice for special educational needs because they do not show in sufficient detail what additional provision is being made or what targets each student is focusing on in a way which is clear enough for them to take effective action to succeed. Examples include 'achieve Level 6 in English', 'improve quality and quantity of written work' and 'attend extra sessions'. The success criteria are often expressed as examination grades, National Curriculum levels or attendance at extra

sessions. There is no clear timetable for achieving these targets or reviewing progress and the outcomes of any reviews that happen are not recorded. However, the students concerned would be unlikely in another establishment to be designated as requiring an Individual Learning Plan.

33. It was not possible to observe any lessons in personal, social and health education during the inspection, but the scheme of work is detailed and relevant, and the subject is well managed. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities in areas such as sport and music, which students enjoy, although the shortness of the lunch break is a limiting factor. Some parents and students expressed regret at the lack of drama within and outside the formal curriculum. The provision for religious education and ICT has improved considerably since the previous inspection, and statutory requirements in these subjects are now met. However, the school, whilst having a comprehensive approach to this regulation, does not fully meet the statutory requirement of providing a collective act of worship for all students on a daily basis, since some tutors do not provide that opportunity within tutor time when there is no assembly. Careers education is good and students in Year 11 do work experience. However, there are no opportunities for vocational courses, for example for the small number of students for whom the study of design and technology and modern foreign languages has been considered unsuitable.

Sixth form

34. Curriculum provision for students in the sixth form is satisfactory. It is very good in physical education, and good in mathematics, chemistry and history. Provision is restricted by lack of recruitment in design and technology, with several students wishing to take up the subject in Year 12 being unable to do so, because the school tries to make all courses cost effective, and prefers groups to contain 12 students. A small group of students studies modern foreign languages on a reduced timetable complemented by after-school "twilight" sessions. For reasons of economy, some teaching groups have been amalgamated, and some courses no longer run. However, students on existing courses are mostly very content with the provision, and a small number of students have the opportunity to attend courses in other local schools. Students also have the opportunity to follow a course in critical thinking and general studies. Although the present sixth form curriculum is confined to academic subjects, the range of these courses has increased since the previous inspection, for example, with the addition of philosophy. The criteria for entry to courses are quite rigorous, but the broadening of vocational opportunities is under consideration. Provision for religious education has been improved since the previous inspection and now meets requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Relationships in the school are very good, with the result that students, as at the time of the previous inspection, receive good quality pastoral care. New students are helped to settle in quickly. Students are appropriately advised about subject, course and career options.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good induction process effectively supports admission to the school.
- Staff are vigilant about health and safety matters.
- Child protection arrangements are in place.
- Advice and guidance based on systematic monitoring of students' academic performance are satisfactory.
- There are good opportunities for students to air their views.
- There are weaknesses in the central record keeping systems, especially where they relate to tracking the progress of lower attaining students.

Commentary

35. Pastoral care, involving heads of year and the senior leadership team, is well organised. Using a full-time matron and a part-time counsellor has strengthened it further. Good links with the feeder primary schools help smooth transition into the school. The prefects and older students mentor younger students, giving them a further sense of security. Students are effectively advised about personal matters, and with the help of Connexions, about academic options and careers. The personal, health and social education programme is quite suitable to raise students' awareness of relevant health, citizenship and social matters, such as ills caused by drugs in society. First aid procedures are in place, equipment is well maintained and there is generally good awareness of safety in the school. Building-related risks are appropriately assessed. There is a designated teacher for child protection who understands agreed procedures and keeps others informed of issues. Students are generally well served by the relevant external agencies and the visiting specialists.
36. Teachers know their students well and are sensitive to their personal circumstances. There is a satisfactory system of assessing and reporting students' progress. The systems to check individual achievement against agreed targets and use this information to support students' performance are also satisfactory. The reporting system and exchange of pastoral information amongst staff provide further means to monitor students' personal development. This, along with the system of rewards and sanctions, provides a deterrent for any oppressive behaviour such as bullying. Students with special educational needs are satisfactorily supported and their progress is monitored, but inadequately recorded for teachers' general use.
37. The organisation of visiting specialists for students with special educational needs (SEN) is good, as is liaison with families. There is good day-to-day communication between the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo), Heads of Year, tutors and teachers, but there are weaknesses in the detailed planning, documentation and analysis of students' difficulties and achievements. The SENCo has extensive pastoral leadership experience but no direct experience of working with students with more complex additional learning needs. The part-time status of the SENCo does not enable provision of day-to-day leadership and specialist guidance and training for teachers. The school now purchases one day a month from the LEA's learning support team and two days a month of behaviour support from the Pupil Referral Service Outreach team to supplement its provision.
38. The current learning support system works alongside existing academic and pastoral support. The quality and usefulness of the individual education plans have not been adequately evaluated. Central record keeping is inadequate, as it does not provide a clear overview of an individual student's progress. Without this, there is an inadequately defined starting point for either governors or the leadership team to track the impact of the provision on standards, achievement and progress.
39. The students who have experience of the school council feel that their opinions were taken seriously and the council achieved a good deal. Some other activities, like the focus group interviews, provide opportunities for students to air their views. Students' questionnaire returns, however, indicated some concern about the school's interest in their views.

Sixth form

40. Sixth formers receive appropriate support. Arrangements to track their progress are in place. Form tutors and the head of sixth form know them well.

Main strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form

- Students' learning is reviewed regularly and targets are set for improvement.
- Students have mixed views regarding the advice they receive about options and careers.

- Students say that they feel involved with the school but they are not as happy with the range of enrichment and activities offered.

Commentary

41. Sixth formers work in a good environment. They are known individually by pastoral and subject staff who are attentive to their needs. A vast majority of the students continue in the school from Year 11 into Years 12 and 13. The few who joined from outside feel they were supported effectively in the transition. All had an effective induction to sixth form work. Systematic, although sometimes informal, arrangements to monitor students' attainment, together with regular discussions with the head of sixth form and form tutors, support their progress. School staff, the careers library, careers officer, visits and information from universities enable students to make choices and continue their education. Many contribute to the life of the school as prefects, working with younger students and helping at school functions. Many students who filled in the questionnaire or made written comments disagreed with the statements on advice and guidance, whether an adult in the school knows them well and the school seeks their views and responds to these well. They were not happy with the range of extra-curricular activities. However, the students interviewed during the inspection were very appreciative of what the school offers and does for them.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Overall, the school's partnership with parents has a good impact on students' learning. Links with other schools and colleges are effective. Links with the wider community helpfully support the curriculum and students' welfare.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with parents are good.
- Communication about students' progress is frequent and generally effective.
- Links with the community are productive.
- Students' annual reports to parents give insufficient guidance about course content and future development.

Commentary

42. The school encourages parents to become involved in the education of their children. They receive termly progress grade sheets, annual reports, information about the school and are invited to individual and collective consultations. The school prospectus and the governors' annual reports are useful publications. Students' annual progress reports to parents contain details of what students have been doing in curriculum subjects, although they do not adequately inform the parents of what students should have been doing, particularly with reference to the National Curriculum levels, or what they can do to raise their children's achievement. However, these annual reports are supplemented by the fact that parents have many opportunities to discuss their children's progress and targets for improvement, and receive progress grades. Parents also receive guidance on how the school and they together can improve students' performance. Some parents would welcome better information about how well their children are learning.
43. The school can rely on most parents' support in dealing with problems related to their children's learning and development. Attendance at formal and informal meetings is good. The parent/teacher association (PTA) is an active body and holds social events and raises substantial money for the school.
44. Effective liaison exists with feeder primary schools, supporting smooth transition to the school. Students benefit from exchange trips with European partner schools. Links with colleges and universities support the next stage of students' learning. The school provides student teacher

placements. This means an additional group of adults to support students' learning and an additional range of appropriate role models. Direct links with industry and business to support the curriculum and widen students' experiences are limited. These are good in some curriculum areas like art and design, modern foreign languages, science and physical education. Employers support students' work experience willingly.

Sixth form

45. Parents and students are generally satisfied with the sixth form. However, links with the community are limited.

Main strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form

- Parents appreciate the widening opportunities the sixth form provides and the progress made by their sons and daughters.
- Little enrichment to learning is gained through links outside school.

Commentary

46. Parents are generally satisfied with the sixth form provision. They have reservations about information on the sixth form and about whether students can get their choices of subject.
47. Subject departments have made relatively few links with organisations outside the school, to enrich and help students apply their learning. The exceptions are business studies, art and design, and science, which have developed productive links with the outside community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership provided by the headteacher and leadership team is well focused on students' attainment and improving the school.
- Leadership and management overall are good.
- Provision for the professional development of most staff is good.
- Management of the school's finances and accommodation is effective, and resources are well deployed to improve learning, although the school has some shortages in resources.
- There are many very good heads of department who exercise their leadership and management roles very well, but there are also some who do not look sufficiently to the development of their roles.
- Some subject leaders believe that they are not sufficiently frequently or formally involved in systematic conversations about their performance to ensure that their work and that of their department is always of appropriate standard.
- Teachers do not use information about students' progress consistently enough to help them to plan lessons and students to improve.

Commentary

48. The headteacher provides the school with a clear sense of purpose. She analyses astutely the environment in which the school finds itself and identifies the way forward. She also recognises the barriers to development that currently exist, for example, funding levels and difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. The headteacher knows her staff and their capabilities well. She regularly reviews their deployment, evaluates the success of the management systems and adapts them accordingly, holding staff accountable for their performance.

49. The headteacher has created an efficient senior leadership team and fosters discussion and debate in the carefully structured formal meetings. All senior staff have a thoughtful and reflective approach to their work and are very hardworking. They operate a good system of performance management, which properly includes support staff. Individual objectives are closely linked to whole school and departmental targets. The success of the performance management system is analysed carefully, for example, the extent to which objectives are achieved. In addition, senior staff meet with subject leaders on a regular basis, both formally and informally. The regular review of departments is mostly incisive and effective, though in some cases, contact is insufficiently frequent to ensure that performance is consistently good. Some of the inconsistencies in the perception of this process of line management have still to be ironed out. Professional development is good, as has been recognised by the local education authority, which uses the school as a model of professional development. The induction of staff to new roles or to the school is very good.
50. Governors take a close interest in the achievements of the school. They support the school well, although minutes of reports of visits to subjects indicate that they do not always pose sufficiently probing questions. They maintain great interest in the development of the subjects to which they are linked and provide satisfactory oversight, but do not record the degree of challenge they provide for staff. They have been very effective in supporting the school's review of finances. Governors ensure that the school meets its statutory obligations for the provision of a collective act of worship for all students each day. They have ensured that there have been improvements in this provision since the time of the last inspection, but the reliance on tutors to complete the provision in tutor time is reasonable and examples of tutors' failure to follow the agreed approach would not alone make governance unsatisfactory, especially as senior members of staff routinely check that the provision is in place.
51. The leadership and management by the heads of department are satisfactory overall, varying from very good to unsatisfactory, and have improved since the last inspection. Most heads of department create effective and harmonious teams, which share good practice to improve the school. Subject leadership varies from very good in design and technology, physical education, history and religious education, to satisfactory in English and unsatisfactory in biology in the sixth form.
52. There are now more robust systems for monitoring teaching and learning at departmental level. In several departments, however, there is still unsatisfactory use of the data available on students' progress, and progress chasing and recording in Years 7 to 11 are insufficient to ensure that all students receive the challenge they need to move forward at the pace that is best for them. In particular, although there are few students with special educational needs, some departments do not adequately match the learning and the materials they use to meet these students' needs well enough.
53. Since the time of the last inspection, development planning has tackled issues raised and significant progress has been made. The senior leadership team and heads of department are well placed to take this further: they have become more expert at setting appropriate targets for the school, though target-setting for individual students, especially in the sixth form, is not always sufficiently ambitious, with the result that achievement is affected. Progress since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory in science.
54. The school receives very little direct funding – none in 2003 to 2004 - to support students with special educational needs and none for support of students with English as an additional language. Systems for academic and pastoral monitoring to identify students at risk of underachievement and disaffection are well established. Developing effective special educational needs provision is a new challenge, and the governors and the leadership team have underestimated both the leadership and management challenges involved. The school maintains a register of students who have a wide range of difficulties for which they receive support, but few of these have special educational needs in the accepted sense of the term, consequently they were misplaced on a register of special educational needs.

55. Governors have not yet been as proactive as they need to be in monitoring the quality and impact of the school's provision for such matters as special educational needs and inclusion. An additional governor will be focusing on special educational needs in the coming year. The school is at an important stage in its development, as the buildings will soon be adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This brings the potential to admit an even broader range of students. The school does not yet fulfil the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act to ensure that students with a disability do not suffer unintended discrimination. Although class teaching is good overall, teachers need to give more attention to adapting tasks and support to meet the full range of abilities. The SENCo's job description and the SEN policy have been revised this term, and require some re-focusing to meet the expectations of the Code of Practice for Special Needs, which came into force in 2002. The school needs to improve the quality and consistency of support provided for the students who experience greatest difficulty with behaviour or learning.
56. The leadership and management of the sixth form are integrated into the whole-school management structure and are satisfactory overall. The head of sixth form has a pastoral and administrative rather than a strategic role, and given the importance of the sixth form in the life of the school, this is unusual. Relevant responsibilities are carried out well, although systems for recording and tracking students' attendance are unsatisfactory. The results of the regular assessments of students are used skilfully to set individual targets during the twice-yearly "target setting fortnight". Targets are discussed in one-to-one reviews with tutors, and the head of sixth form interviews students with distinctive achievements or difficulties. Careful guidance is provided on the choice of courses, both at the beginning of Year 12 and the transition from Year 12 to 13. The head of sixth form plays a pivotal role in successfully recruiting students to the expanding sixth form and in creating the happy climate that prevails.
57. Financial management is generally good, but the school has this year, for the first time, had to take severe measures to cope with budgetary constraints. Whilst these measures have been well thought through, there are several areas in which restrictions on expenditure are having an adverse effect on the school as a whole. For example, the constraints upon sixth form group sizes mean that a number of subjects, previously viable with six or eight students, cannot now be run. The required minimum group size of 12 has prevented some subjects from offering courses this year for the first time. In general, resources are well used and, though not lavish in any part of the school, are sufficient to ensure that the agreed timetable and deployment are effective.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,784,819
Total expenditure	2,983,046
Expenditure per pupil	3,140.04

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	153,397
Balance carried forward to the next	-44,830

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

Commentary

Overall, the quality of provision for English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Literature results in GCSE are well above national averages.
- Extra-curricular activities give students a wide experience of poetry, drama and debating.
- Teachers are conscientious and diligent.
- Lessons are often insufficiently challenging.
- Teachers make too little use of assessment data to monitor the progress of groups of students.
- Development plans fail to provide a sufficiently clear agenda for improvement.

Commentary

58. Standards achieved by both boys and girls by the end of Year 9 are well above national expectations. The proportion of students attaining higher levels is equivalent to that in science but significantly lower than that in mathematics. Standards in the tests have declined for each of the four years up to 2002, but revived to the level of 2000 in 2003. Standards in the GCSE Literature examination are well above the national average, but in Language only above. Girls perform better than boys. Overall, these results are lower than those for most grammar schools, due to one or two students obtaining lower grades than expected.
59. Standards obtained in external exams were higher than those seen in lessons. Students in Years 7 to 9 do less writing than they could, covering a narrow range, and presenting it untidily in their books. Lively poetry was being composed in a Year 7 class (for instance, pastiches of gothic), but non-fiction writing lacks the required range to show sufficient progression. Standards of speaking are above national expectation, but could be higher with more concentration on the skill of presentation and debate. Reading is encouraged by regular use of the library in Years 7 to 9 and students read well. This leads to good levels of borrowing.
60. Achievement overall is satisfactory; students attain results in line with those expected, both in Year 9 tests and GCSE Language examinations. Literature results are well above the national average and show good achievement. However, students throughout Years 7 to 11 are not given enough opportunity to build on their innate ability. Though they can perform well in tests and exams, they are not sufficiently required to reflect, speak, or argue, nor to write imaginatively or at length.
61. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is often good and generally at least satisfactory, but only satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are conscientious, and diligent in marking. They prepare lessons well, and show a good knowledge of language and literature, but do not always explain how the two are integrated. Teachers are better at giving students information than encouraging them to think and discuss. They are often satisfied with low standards of presentation. Though there are many attractive examples of desktop publishing on classroom walls, students seldom use word-processing to re-draft their work. Lack of challenge means that students are not learning as rapidly as they might. They know what they have to do, and how to set about it, but the task itself requires less thought and application than these students require. Year 7 students responded very well to enthusiastic teaching of a poem by Yeats,

absorbing the poem's atmosphere of mystery and excitement, but this quality of response was rare. In general, teachers do not structure their lessons exactly enough to ensure that all pupils respond in this way, and they do not seize on opportunities for widening students' awareness of the spiritual and cultural implications of what they study.

62. Leadership is satisfactory. There is a very strong team spirit in the department that leads to sharing of ideas and resources, and is appreciated by students. However, management is lacking rigour and clarity in its action planning. The department rightly sees quality of writing as a priority, but does not identify the best way of improving it. Moreover, there is plenty of assessment data, but little use is made of it to identify underachievers, although in Year 10 there is a boys only group in response to the outcomes of data on students' progress, and sets in Year 9 and Year 11 are organised on the basis of prior attainment. The department has organised INSET appropriate to its needs, but has not yet made full use of the guidance and resources given. The department offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, which include lunch time clubs for debating and creative writing, visits to theatres, and opportunities for drama groups to perform in school.
63. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Exam results in both GCSE and A-level have improved. The library is now better stocked, and makes a much greater contribution to the standards of reading and research. Schemes of work are comprehensive, but some do not relate to learning outcomes, and these are restricted to writing. Lack of close matching of teaching and work in Years 7 to 9 to students' needs is still not sufficiently extending the ablest students. The recent decision to omit specialist drama from the curriculum weakens it, impairing the quality of students' speaking, and scope for expressing their feelings. Other strengths noted previously have been well maintained.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

64. Standards of literacy are above the national average. Students consistently write accurately, with high standards of spelling and punctuation, and a generally wide vocabulary. They can cope with the specialist terms used in all subjects. The head of the English department has led training for all staff, with support from the LEA adviser. A literacy theme and portable display boards are provided for teachers to follow in each term's lessons. Departments have discussed their particular contribution to literacy in their own meetings. The emphasis has been on writing, but standards of speaking and listening were good in many classes, notably modern foreign languages, geography, history and religious education. In nearly all lessons, students proved they could read fluently and understand the text. Fortnightly library lessons for Years 7, 8 and 9 ensure that students can use the library effectively, and that books are borrowed and commented on.

Modern foreign languages

French, German and Spanish

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE are well above average in French and above average in Spanish.
- There is some very good teaching which enthuses and engages students.
- There is a small minority of unsatisfactory teaching and some that is just satisfactory.
- Results are below average in German.
- Results are not looked at carefully.
- The department contributes very well to students' social and cultural development.
- All teachers are well-qualified dual linguists and there is good foreign language assistant provision.

Commentary

65. In 2003, GCSE results were well above average in **French**, above average in **Spanish** and just below in **German**. Girls' and boys' performance in French was well above average. There was a significant improvement in girls' performance in Spanish and a move upwards in German. Boys' performance also improved in German and in Spanish. Standards in current Years 10 and 11 are also above average. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average.
66. Achievement is very good in some language lessons. This is directly linked to the very high quality of teaching, to which students respond with interest and enthusiasm. Teaching overall is good. The features of the very best teaching are thorough, detailed planning; swift pace; high expectations; challenging and varied work; and a teacher manner that is supportive and encouraging. In a Year 8 German lesson, students were already able to speak confidently in the past tense about their school day showing high levels of grammatical awareness and accuracy. In addition to this intense focus on accuracy, there was also a range of games that provided both amusement and thorough listening skills' practice. Overall achievement is good in all languages. Although girls achieve better than boys, the gap is being closed.
67. When teaching is just satisfactory and, occasionally, unsatisfactory, students do not learn sufficiently well, as a result of the slow pace, restrictive work and lack of planning for students of different abilities. In these lessons, when students are not given enough opportunity to practise their speaking skills in meaningful situations that allow a degree of choice, they show little interest or enthusiasm and pronunciation is weak. However, teaching is frequently good and teachers speak the language being taught almost exclusively, providing good role models for students. The department also makes good use of information and communication technology to enhance language learning.
68. There has been good improvement since the last inspection as standards have risen and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement is narrowing. Leadership of the department is good. There is a clear vision of what constitutes high quality teaching and learning and a committed and effective team has been nurtured after a difficult period of staffing turbulence. The team demonstrates this commitment through an impressive range of trips and residential opportunities abroad. Management is satisfactory. Some practices for checking consistency across the department have been established but some inconsistencies remain, for example, in the quantity and quality of marking. Results need to be analysed more thoroughly in order that important messages about teaching and learning are not missed.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average, and rising.
- Teaching is good and students achieve well.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work.
- Computers are not used enough in the teaching of mathematics.
- The teaching lacks oral practice in the recall of basic formulae, particularly for those students likely to study A-level mathematics.

Commentary

69. In the 2003 national test results for students completing Year 9, standards were high in relation to all schools, an improvement on earlier years. In comparison with grammar schools, results were average as all students exceeded the level expected for their age, but below average for the number of students at the higher levels. Performance was better than in

English and science. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, standards were well above the national average for all maintained schools, but below the average for grammar schools, due to one or two students attaining grade D rather than grade C. There is no significant difference between boys and girls.

70. The standard of work seen in the inspection reflects the examination results. In Year 9, high attaining students can solve equations using both theoretical and practical methods. They are learning to use graphical calculators to sketch simple functions. Average attaining students use positive and negative signs accurately in the solution of equations. Lower attaining students solve simple questions in trigonometry and are gradually becoming more accurate in the use of negative numbers. They quickly forget new learning so the regular practice of routine work is helpful to them.
71. The standard of work in Year 11 is well above average. High attaining students' revision in trigonometry is limited because basic formulae are not embedded in students' memories. This results in lost time for the solution of more complex problems. Factors in algebra are not yet secure enough. Lower attaining students' solution to problems is enhanced by the very good attitudes they have to their work, and the helpful whole-class discussions encouraged in the teaching.
72. Teaching and learning are good overall. There is some very good teaching and a small element of unsatisfactory teaching. The strength of the teaching lies in the subject expertise of the teachers, providing accurate and good examples in mathematics which students can copy and from which they learn. Planning of lessons is good overall, providing a good framework for learning. There is a lack of short, sharp mental practice in lessons to reinforce earlier learning, but lessons generally move at a good pace. Homework is used well and all students do it because they are engaged well in their learning. In the very good teaching, students are challenged very well in their thinking skills by the nature of the questions posed. Further learning is skilfully developed by more advanced work, new and interesting to students, who are obliged to respond orally to show what they know. The unsatisfactory teaching is due to unsatisfactory management of students.
73. Leadership and management are good. An appropriate development plan has been produced. The staff form a stable, cohesive and effective team of teachers, committed to improving standards. Initiatives are in hand, such as the additional aspects of mathematics for the higher attaining students in Year 10, in an effort to prepare them more thoroughly for A-level. The use of assessment is good, in the investigation into gender differences in Year 7, for example. This is a developing feature in the department's work. Access to computers is limited, restricting learning in some aspects of the curriculum. Calculating machines are used well. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Year 9 have improved. Teaching quality, standards at the end of Year 11, achievement of students and the lack of access to ICT are the same as at the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

74. The use of mathematics across the curriculum is good overall. In art and design students in Year 8 have investigated the golden section and looked at the structure of pyramids. Ratios are used in Year 7. Students are made aware of three-dimensional space in some of the perspective studies, single point perspective in students' visual drawings. Many aspects of mathematics are seen in geography and science, especially graph work. Correlation and lines of best fit form the more advanced work seen in Years 10 and 11. Use is also good in design and technology, good use of charts, for example. In religious education, comparative bar charts are used well.
75. Overall standards are well above average in the use of mathematics across the curriculum. Standards are high in ICT in the use of the more complex nature of spreadsheets in Years 10 and 11. In music, pattern, shape, order and sequence in composition have developed well through the teaching. In design and technology, Year 7 students understand the use of

negative numbers in studying the flow of electricity. Standards are well above average in geography and science.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- New departmental leadership and management are beginning to result in effective planning and monitoring of the work of students and staff.
- Standards are well above average but represent unsatisfactory achievement by Year 11, particularly by higher attainers.
- In the best lessons, careful planning and good relationships promote good learning.
- Marking and assessment do not give enough guidance to students about how to improve their work.
- Progress since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning does not ensure the sharing of very good practice.
- Students' practical and investigative skills are not as good as their science knowledge.

Commentary

76. In 2002, results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national averages for all schools, but well below those for grammar schools. Compared with students' high attainment on entry, the results indicated that the rate of progress was too slow. Results were better than those for English, but not as good as those in mathematics. Results for 2003 indicate a slight improvement over those of 2002.
77. GCSE results in 2002 were very high compared to the national average, but the proportion of grades A*-C was below average for similar schools. Boys' performance was slightly better than girls' over the period 2000 to 2002 in the national tests and GCSE examinations. Results for 2003 show a slight drop in the number of students achieving grades A*-C. Results for the triple sciences indicate a higher average point score per student than for the combined science course. Overall, standards in science are not as high as they should be and achievement is currently unsatisfactory for many boys and girls in Years 7 to 11.
78. Standards by Year 9 are well above average, broadly reflecting attainment in recent test results. Standards by Year 11 are well above average, but are lower than those indicated by the 2002 GCSE results. Almost all students enter the school with above average standards in science but they do not make fast enough progress. In Years 7 to 11, most middle and lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory and often good progress. When work indicates satisfactory achievement, students have an adequate knowledge of the science of life and living processes and an appropriate understanding of materials and their properties and of physical processes. However, in many classes in Years 7 to 11, a small proportion of the highest attaining students are underachieving. Teachers pitch the work to suit the needs of middle and lower attainers in the class and do not always provide work of sufficient challenge, difficulty and relevance for all students.
79. There are relatively few opportunities for students to research appropriate information, think critically about it and produce original extended writing. Consequently, they sometimes give answers lacking depth and understanding and do not apply their knowledge sufficiently well. Many students expect to be provided with answers. This situation has not significantly improved since the previous inspection report. Overall, students' practical and individual investigative skills are not as strong as the knowledge-based areas of science. They seldom plan their own experiments from which they can evaluate the results and draw conclusions. When teaching is very good, for example, as in a Year 11 lesson about energy changes in

chemical reactions, students make very good progress in scientific investigations and have suitable skills in planning, implementing and recording results. Students in these classes perform practical work with confidence and independence.

80. The development of students' literacy skills is generally well supported with most students having confidence in using scientific terminology. The standard of presentation of students' writing across the whole ability range is good overall, in response to teachers' expectations. The use of mathematics is quite well developed and graphical skills are good, overall. Students' ICT skills, although improving, are not well developed because of the lack of opportunity to use computers to collect information, particularly when performing their own experiments.
81. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teaching ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. It was at least satisfactory in almost nine out of ten lessons; in about half, it was good or very good. There is slightly more good teaching in Years 7 to 9 where teachers are beginning to implement the National Science Strategy. The difference in the quality of teaching produces marked difference in students' responses to learning.
82. In the best lessons, teachers plan effectively so that students see the importance and relevance of what they are doing. A very good atmosphere is created within which high expectations are shared with students. Teachers ask questions with speed, skill and enthusiasm, explanations are clear and there is a good range of interesting activities. Relationships are good. As a result, students develop curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, asking as well as answering questions. This was seen to best effect in a Year 9 lesson about the trends in the alkali metals, and in a Year 11 class on chemical reactions.
83. In some lessons, which were otherwise satisfactory, the range of learning is quite narrow and teaching is uninspiring and too formal. These lessons do not stimulate students' enthusiasm and do not encourage them to enjoy science. In less than satisfactory lessons, the pace is often slow with some over-emphasis on undemanding and uninspiring worksheets that provide little opportunity for extending writing or discussion. In these lessons, teachers have low expectations of students and make inefficient use of time. Unsurprisingly, some students become bored and chat among themselves about irrelevant matters.
84. Although teachers mark students' books regularly, they do not consistently provide evaluative comments to show students how to improve. Extension work for higher-attaining students, even in the best lessons, does not challenge them sufficiently. A major contributory factor to any underachievement is the difficulty recruiting suitably qualified physics teachers.
85. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory, but with the potential effectively to raise achievement further. There has been slow progress on issues from the previous inspection, though with significant changes recently. A good awareness of the department's strengths and weaknesses has already resulted in appropriate plans to tackle underachievement and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership now has direction and purpose. The department recognises the need to improve the ways students' work is assessed, and progress tracked and checked for improvement. The very good teaching skills evident in some lessons are not used enough to influence and improve the practice overall. Currently, monitoring of the curriculum does not ensure adequate planned opportunities for the development of some skills, including ICT, or appropriate provision for all higher attaining students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision of information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in GCSE is well above the national average.
- Insufficient progress is made by the age of 14.
- The use of ICT to support learning is underdeveloped in some subjects.
- The quality of teaching is variable, ranging from excellent, a strength of the school, to unsatisfactory, where attention is needed.
- There is a need for further staff development in the use of ICT in subjects.

Commentary

86. Attainment in GCSE and in class is well above the national average. In Years 10 and 11 all students follow a GCSE course in ICT. Current standards of work are well above the national average with most students expected to pass with a higher grade. There has been a significant recent improvement in the attainment of students following the short course GCSE. Attainment by age 14 is in line with the nationally expected level.
87. Attainment in Year 9 is around the national expectation. Students can create a logo and letterhead using a variety of applications, including research on the Internet. They can create graphs from a spreadsheet to show meteorological information and use a desktop publishing program to create a poster. Standards by the age of 16 are significantly above the national average. Several students categorised as requiring special support demonstrated high achievement. There are no noticeable differences in the performance of girls and boys.
88. Students arrive at the school with a range of experiences of using ICT. A majority have the use of ICT at home and therefore have the means to reinforce their skills. The school is introducing the National Strategy materials in Years 7 and 8. Work shows that students are making good progress in Years 7 to 8. Progress in Year 9 is below that of which some are capable and there is scope for further development of the teaching programme in order to provide access to higher level work.
89. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. There are examples of excellent and unsatisfactory teaching. There is some inconsistency of teaching in Year 9 and the characteristics of the most effective teaching are not shared. Planning and assessment are very good in Years 10 and 11 but further work is needed in developing the teaching programme in Year 9. In an excellent lesson in Year 10, the teacher had designed a lesson that enabled students to choose different applications, including the Internet, for research. They worked with high motivation and were exceptionally fluent in using applications at a high ICT level. In a Year 9 lesson where the teaching was unsatisfactory, students made slow progress in undertaking simple tasks with a spreadsheet.
90. Leadership is satisfactory. Some developments have been held back by a shortage of funding. Facilities have been extended in recent years, although there is insufficient access to ICT to promote students' ICT capability fully through subject teaching and learning. Management of the subject is generally good, although there are some weaknesses in relation to planning and ensuring greater consistency of teaching. ICT systems work reliably. Since the last inspection, the unsatisfactory progress reported in Years 10 and 11 has now changed to good progress. The use of ICT in subjects has developed since the last report, although there is still scope for further development.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

91. All teachers have completed a national training programme and many have been supplied with laptop computers. The number of computers in the school is below average and the school's plans to extend ICT provision with an additional area to support ICT are most timely. This is a fast-developing area, stimulated by government funding, that is providing software and content across most subject areas. ICT across subjects is satisfactory overall but is underdeveloped in some subjects, such as in English, geography and aspects of science. There are good examples of ICT in history and design and technology. An example of the effective use of ICT in a subject was the study of the reasons why the Armada failed. In this lesson, students researched key information from a range of web sites and produced high quality presentations of their findings. In English, there are few planned opportunities to use ICT. Further teacher training is needed in order to get better value from the school's investment in ICT systems.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Good teaching stimulates students to do their best.
- GCSE results are consistently good.
- The very good range of fieldwork opportunities, especially in Years 10 and 11, enables students to explore geographical ideas in depth.
- Good display work in classrooms celebrates students' work and amplifies and illustrates teaching and learning objectives.
- The tracking of pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 is not sufficiently developed, as it does not make effective use of the available data on their attainment.
- The departmental handbook and schemes of work are not in line with current developments in the subject.

Commentary

92. The vast majority of students enter the school with levels of attainment that are above the national average. In 2002, by the end of Year 9, all students achieved Level 5 or better in the National Curriculum teacher assessments, with 83 per cent achieving Level 6 or better. In 2003, the proportion gaining Level 6 or better rose to 84 per cent. The attainment of students is, therefore, well above the national average. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average with 96 per cent of students attaining a grade C or better, of which 82 per cent were awarded a grade B or better. Students achieved significantly better in geography in comparison to other subjects in which they were examined and there was very little difference between the performance of boys and girls. The 2003 GCSE results reflect a broadly similar pattern.
93. Teaching and learning are good overall with no unsatisfactory teaching. Most of the teaching was good or very good, especially in Years 10 and 11. High expectations, a brisk pace of work and a wide range of activities were all features of successful lessons in which learning objectives were clear and in which students showed a mature understanding of the work and the steps that they needed to take to improve further. A Year 11 class preparing for mock examinations and sharing their learning at the end of the lesson and another class in the same year brainstorming ideas on the topic of deforestation showed students being prepared to listen to their peers and to take full responsibility for their own learning. Another class working on charitable aid to less economically developed countries produced students with excellent skills in summarising and presenting complex ideas.

94. Students in Years 7 to 9 developing an understanding of the structure of urban areas show very good map work skills and are able to relate their learning to their own environment. In all such lessons, planning is detailed, the needs of all students are met and the learning reviewed and reinforced. Where the level of challenge was insufficient, students spent too long on undemanding tasks and, as a consequence, made slower progress. Marking and assessment are good with teachers offering constructive comments to enable students to improve as well as relating the standard of work to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. The tracking of pupil progress using the data that is abundant in the school is insufficiently well developed.
95. Achievement is good. Students who enter the school with levels of attainment above national expectations are well above expectations by the end of Year 9. They sustain this improvement through to the end of Year 11. In 2002, 25 per cent of the entries for GCSE achieved A* grades, a figure that indicates the extent to which students respond to challenging teaching and high expectations. The teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 and the GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend and pupils' achievement at GCSE is now particularly good.
96. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The head of department is newly in post and is in the process of reviewing the schemes of work and the departmental handbook. Further work on tracking pupils' progress is needed, as is the use of ICT as a teaching and learning aid. There were some excellent examples of the use of ICT in students' GCSE course work but there were no examples of its use during the inspection. The wall displays in the two geography rooms are used frequently to illustrate teaching points and to celebrate students' work. The resources of the department are adequate, although, because of the increasing popularity of the subject at GCSE level, some lessons have to be taught away from the specialist geography rooms and this inhibits the use of resource-based teaching. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

History

Overall provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' standards are well above average.
- Students achieve and learn well, in response to good teaching.
- There is very good assessment, which helps students make good progress.
- There is very good leadership and management of a successful department.
- Students have very positive attitudes, which contribute to the good learning.
- The use of ICT and fieldwork as an aid to learning is relatively undeveloped.

Commentary

97. The 2003 teacher assessments of students in Year 9 and the proportion of students in Year 11 attaining an A*- C grade in GCSE showed standards well above the national average, in line with the trend of the previous two years. Particularly pleasing has been the considerable rise in the number of A and B grades in GCSE over the past two years, as the result of adaptations to teaching methods by the department. Students' standards, both in Year 9 and Year 11, are well above the national average, in both knowledge and understanding and in the skills of interpreting and evaluating evidence. The high standards are the result of good teaching and the very positive attitudes of students who are keen to learn, and are also the result of the high standard of literacy skills which enable students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding very well, both verbally and in a range of writing. Students display higher level historical skills, so that, for example, Year 9 students are able to discuss different historical interpretations of an individual like King John. Students on the GCSE course are able to discuss the qualities of examination answers with a good understanding of the relevant assessment criteria. Students join the school with standards above average and

those of all levels of attainment, including the gifted and talented, achieve well throughout their time in school, because of the appropriately challenging expectations of teachers. The majority of students from ethnic minorities achieve particularly well.

98. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The very good subject knowledge of teachers is translated into high expectations to which students respond well, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on Thomas Becket which led to a discussion on church-state relationships in medieval England. Students are encouraged to learn actively through discussion. GCSE students learn good examination technique, know how well they are doing and have clear targets relating to how they can improve. Teachers' marking is very helpful in this process.
99. Leadership and management are very good. The department has carried out a very detailed programme of monitoring, review and evaluation of all aspects of its practice, and there is a strong focus on development for more success. The impact of this has been considerable: for example, the use of assessment data and a careful examination of teaching and learning strategies have been significant factors in ensuring that students of all levels of attainment are taught to an appropriate level; and practice has been modified in order to improve the achievement of boys and access to the highest grades in examinations. The department has adapted successfully to the requirements of new syllabuses and to developments such as the drive to raise standards of literacy, which is evident in the emphasis put on encouraging students to express themselves in discussion. Although the use of ICT has been increased, and was seen to good effect in a Year 8 lesson as a means of showing links between different reasons for the defeat of the Spanish Armada, it is an area still relatively undeveloped. There is also a limited range of extra activities such as fieldwork.
100. Strengths such as good progress and effective leadership and management have been maintained since 1998. Standards are now higher, and assessment has improved. Therefore, overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school achieves excellent results in the short-course GCSE examination.
- There is very good teaching, some of which features innovative learning activities.
- Marking of students' work is supportive and gives them a clear understanding of how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.
- The head of department is providing very good leadership.
- The subject makes a considerable contribution to students' personal development and supports their acquisition of skills of expressing themselves both verbally and in writing.
- Teachers do not sufficiently utilise information about students' attainment in other subjects in order to intervene early and prevent the underachievement of a small number of students, mainly boys, in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

101. Students' achievement in religious education is good overall and very good by the end of Year 11. During Years 7 to 9, most students make good progress so that by the end of Year 9 they are demonstrating standards well above those normally seen from students of this age. During Years 10 and 11, students' attainment improves further and excellent results are produced in the short-course GCSE examination; this sustains a trend of improving examination results.
102. There is a significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Although this difference is no greater than that found nationally in the subject, it is a challenge for the department to close the gap and reduce underachievement by some students.

103. The quality of teaching and of learning are very good overall. Very good relationships within class groups and between students and teachers contribute to productive lessons. Lessons are always well planned and feature a variety of appropriate and often innovative activities that engage the interest and commitment of students. In one very effective Year 10 lesson, a soft toy was thrown from pupil to pupil to allow each to speak in a discussion; the same lesson involved the use of music and a variation on the game of noughts and crosses to secure students' interest and understanding. A Year 7 class was typical of lessons in the department in involving students in paired and small group discussions before they did written work in a novel format that engaged their interest and enthusiasm. Learning is enhanced by supportive assessment practice that gives students a clear understanding of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students are enabled and encouraged to assess their own work and are given opportunities to assess each other's work in a helpful way. In a Year 11 class, students did a timed examination question and then swapped papers and marked each other's work on the basis of a mark scheme they were given. Students then had to tell the class what mark they had given their classmates and open their marking to discussion and adjudication.
104. Religious education lessons support the students' learning in other areas of the curriculum by providing structured writing opportunities that encourage students to express themselves clearly whilst being imaginative. Lessons provide many opportunities for well-managed debate and discussion. In Year 7, students conduct a survey on people's beliefs and displayed their results using a histogram, thereby enhancing their understanding of the practical uses of mathematics. The subject makes a considerable contribution to students' spiritual, moral and social development, although there is scope to improve the contribution to their cultural development by extending interaction with local faith communities and incorporating greater attention to the significance of art, music and architecture within religious traditions.
105. The leadership of religious education is very good, as is its day-to-day management. The head of department is an effective role model to colleagues in the department and has a clear vision of the way in which she wishes to develop the department. Departmental documentation is extensive and of good quality. Lesson planning is thorough and there is a consistent approach within the department without the individuality of teachers being stifled. A very effective system for assessing student's attainment has been put in place and is being well managed to ensure consistency in judgements between different teachers. There is a need to develop the use of information about students' performance in other subjects to form appropriate expectations of each student and identify underachievement at an early stage. The departmental development plan identifies appropriate priorities but does not include costings or an assessment of the time needed to achieve some of the targets. Provision is more effective than at the time of the last inspection and progress has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching from knowledgeable and experienced teachers supports good standards.
- Good assessment strategies, particularly those using the examination board criteria for coursework in Years 10 and 11, steadily raise standards.
- Improvements in the way the curriculum is being planned, now including food studies into the design and technology curriculum, allows more effective use of time and avoids duplication and waste.
- The very good attitudes that students bring to their learning enable them to learn well.
- Very good leadership by the new head of department is forming an effective team that manages the department very well.

Commentary

106. In the GCSE examination, results by subject in design and technology vary year-on-year because the make-up of the groups varies. Some students follow a short course in a range of design and technology areas whereas others follow a full course. Not all students follow the subject to examination level, some giving it up at the end of Year 9, whilst others follow a Food Studies course that does not yet fully meet the requirements for design & technology accreditation. The overall results are significantly better than national averages overall, but significantly lower than students' grades in their other subjects. Boys' results are worse than girls', but there is variation between subjects. In lessons, both boys and girls attain similarly. When considering the progress the students make throughout the school, their achievement is nonetheless good.
107. At the end of Year 9, teachers assess that students' attainment is above the national averages at Level 5 and above. Currently, there are few students working at the very highest levels when compared with the national averages, but the school has identified this as a matter to address. Progress then is good and students achieve well, though few achieve very well.
108. This results from good teaching with effective teaching materials, real expertise and a genuine commitment from staff to enable students to do well. Teaching is good and enables good learning. Students have very good attitudes to learning in the earlier years. Resources are being built up which enable not only the full National Curriculum to be taught, but offer exciting opportunities to make work of quality. The new expertise in food technology is being brought to bear on the work of the department and is producing a scheme of work that marries in well with current design and technology plans. Examination work is of a good standard and students are supported by helpful assessment that uses the examination marking criteria very well to help raise standards. Learning is good and students show maturity, listening well and working quickly to make the best progress they can. Teachers give very high expectations of the quality of their work and behaviour and students respond very well.
109. There is very good leadership of the team of proficient teachers and day-to-day matters are managed very well. The previous management expertise, gained by the head of department before coming to the school, is demonstrated in the high quality of teamwork evident in the department. Here, teachers and technician staff are all equally valued and play their part in taking students' education forward.
110. The accommodation and resources have been recently refurbished and provide a stimulating environment. Resources are generally good, with the exception of access to computers and appropriate software. The improvement since the last inspection has been good and with the new staffing and refurbished accommodation, signs are already in place that progress will continue.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Overall provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are well informed and provide good support to students.
- Assessing and recording systems are in place but are lacking in rigour.
- Achievement, from entry to Year 7 to the end of Year 9, is good.
- Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11.
- Access to ICT resources in the art studios is unsatisfactory at present.

Commentary

111. Students' attainment on entry to Year 7 is below national expectations for their age. Basic drawing and painting skills are largely underdeveloped and craft skills are weak. However, most students enjoy the subject and work well to improve their drawing skills in the first year. They make good progress in Years 8 and 9, by the end of which they have achieved a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations. Achievement is good.
112. In the 2002 GCSE examination in art and design, the number of students that achieved the highest grades of A* to C, at 74 per cent, was above the national figure of 65 per cent. Attainment by girls was well above that of girls nationally. However, these students performed much better in their other school subjects than in art and design. In the 2003 examination, there was significant improvement and 91 per cent of students achieved the highest grades, which was well above the national figure. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Achievement from the start of Year 10 to the end of Year 11 is good. In lessons, pupils were making good progress and achieving well.
113. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to good but is good overall. Teachers are well informed and possess good subject knowledge, which ensures that they are in a position to offer informed advice and support to students. Teachers set clear objectives for students during lessons, as a consequence of which they know what they are expected to do. Management of time and resources is satisfactory, but there are occasions when introductions to lessons are too long, resulting in a loss of concentration. At present, students have access to a range of resources, such as watercolour paints and traditional craft materials, that are used to produce their final pieces of work.
114. The majority of students work with a sense of purpose to communicate their concepts and ideas through their art and craftwork. They operate mainly within a narrow, traditional model of the curriculum that places undue emphasis on drawing painting and craft skills, providing students with little opportunity to produce images through the use of computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers. Provision of ICT within the art studios is unsatisfactory at present.
115. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. The head of department has a clear vision for the department and how it should be developed in the future. There is a departmental development plan, which has been prepared in conjunction with others in the department. The current systems that are in place for assessing, tracking and recording students' progress lack rigour. Much more detailed recording of students' achievement is required at all stages to enable assessment to be carried out thoroughly and to ensure that more accurate targets can be set for individual students. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are highly inflated as the majority of these students are, in fact, producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations, not well above.
116. Accommodation and resources are good, though there are some problems surrounding the storage of large, three-dimensional pieces of work.

Music

Provision in music is **good**, with some very good, even exceptional and some unsatisfactory features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good and energetic leadership and management provide a clear vision for music education.
- The high quality of teaching and learning results in good achievement.

- The music curriculum throughout the school is broad, balanced and very well delivered. However, the lack of sufficient and appropriate ICT, especially in Key Stage 3, fails to meet statutory requirements.
- Extra-curricular provision is very varied, including the relatively high percentage of students enjoying instrumental tuition, but results of those pupils' achievements are not published in the annual governors' report.
- Standards are improving in Years 7 to 9 but constrained by shortage of time.
- There is currently only limited opportunity for music post-16.

Commentary

117. Average results in teacher assessments in Year 9 continue a rising trend. They have been building on improving work in Years 7 and 8. Work seen in class confirms this trend. On entry to the school, pupils' standards of attainment in music are poor, often far below the national standards expected. For example, in Year 7 and 8 classes, approximately two-thirds of pupils had no prior experience of playing instruments together in class-based music lessons. Standards are average by the end of Year 9, representing very good achievement, although a few pupils yet have difficulty with some important musical concepts. The majority are developing greater confidence in singing, playing and composing, both as individuals and in larger groups. The focus of pupils' attention, especially when listening to music, is significantly better and provides a secure foundation for those who might elect to follow GCSE courses.
118. In Years 10 and 11, groups of pupils follow optional courses leading to GCSE music. Standards in recent times have been variable due to staffing difficulties but current cohorts of pupils are on course to achieve good results.
119. Teaching and learning in music throughout the school are never less than good and sometimes very good with outstanding features. In all year groups, the impact of very well qualified teachers and expert musicians is clearly seen in very detailed planning, preparation and presentation of lessons. Teachers' very high expectations of pupils' and students' engagement with music in performing, composing and critical listening is characterised by unusually high levels of energy and dynamism coupled with sensitivity to the needs of individuals. This engenders very positive attitudes, behaviour and attention to the task in hand by pupils and students who clearly value their music lessons highly. Consequently, lessons had positive outcomes, especially in the significantly improved levels of achievement seen.
120. The music staff and pupils demonstrate their enjoyment of music making and their commitment to the life of the whole school by their involvement in a wide range of instrumental and vocal ensembles, performing in school concerts and productions and further afield in the local community. A notable example of this was the arts festival, staged earlier this year to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the local Church and for which the head of department raised £8,000 (£5,000 from the National Lottery and £3,000 from South Buckinghamshire Arts).
121. The department is very well led with very clear vision and unusually high levels of commitment and energy. Management is very good. Planning for improvement is very well sustained and securely grounded in well-judged monitoring and assessment procedures that feed back into lesson planning and curriculum revision. A very well planned, balanced and broad curriculum shows very good understanding and use of National Curriculum levels for monitoring and self-evaluation that assists lesson and curriculum planning. However, it is constrained by the limitations of accommodation and insufficient ICT for its proper delivery.
122. The very high expectations of teachers are now improving standards rapidly. The quality of teaching, learning and achievement are very good and sometimes outstanding.
123. Progress since the last inspection is good. There is currently no opportunity for music post-16 because of insufficient recruitment, accommodation, staffing and resources, especially ICT,

although there is provision for continuing instrumental tuition and participation in musical activities.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently high and are supported well by very good assessment procedures.
- Standards in PE lessons are above average.
- Standards reached in the very good extra-curricular programme are above average.

Commentary

124. Standards reached by students in Year 9 are above average. They make good progress in lessons. Their knowledge of how to develop skills and their ability to use evaluations make a positive contribution to the improvement of their work. In health-related fitness lessons, students are able to measure their pulse rate accurately and plot and interpret their fitness in relation to recovery rates. They have good ball skills in netball and football and are able to apply advanced tactics in games. Students are not always aware of their body shape in gymnastics and dance.
125. Results at GCSE are consistently very high. The standard of students' work at the end of Year 9 remains in line with the national average and attainment at the end of Year 11 is above national expectations. In 2003, the GCSE results were well above the national average. Standards reached by students in Year 11 are above average. These students do not opt to follow a GCSE in this subject and tend to be of lower ability. However their skills are refined and their excellent attitudes lead to good achievement. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as other students. Asian cultural influence adds a rich dimension to dance. Students with special educational needs also achieve as well as other students because tasks are designed to meet their educational needs.
126. Students who follow a GCSE course reach very high standards and achieve very well. They have a very good depth of knowledge, particularly in anatomy, and apply theories accurately with good cross-reference to other aspects. Their notes are a very good resource for revision and often show added independent research. There is limited use of information and communication technology skills. Their practical work is very high. The boys have excellent skills in rugby and are able to accurately analyse pieces of set play, such as the ruck, because of their very good knowledge of the component parts of a skill. The girls have well above average skills in netball.
127. The very good extra-curricular programme provides students with a wide range of activities, such as rowing, in addition to traditional games. Individuals and teams enjoy success at local, county and national levels and also in inter-house matches at school level. Those performing in the evening of dance and music explore and interpret dances from a variety of cultures. Gifted and talented students achieve very well.
128. Teaching and its impact on learning is very good overall. It is best in GCSE lessons. The teachers create an effective learning environment through high level of challenge, high expectations of work rate and by demanding high standards of work relative to the attainment of the students. Question and answer sessions promote good development of students' technical vocabulary and understanding of the broader aspects, such as health related fitness. However, planning for the development of numeracy and ICT skills is not as effective. Homework links well to lessons and extends students well. Assessment is used particularly effectively to highlight areas of development for individual students. These targets are

reviewed regularly and the support given leads to improvement. Teachers have good knowledge of the activities they teach and use demonstration effectively to highlight good performance. Those students who are unable to take part in lessons are not always given tasks to involve them closely in what is being taught.

129. Very good leadership of the department has a positive impact in the raising of standards. A good start has been made in improving the consistency of teaching. Very clear vision and direction are provided and there is a good team spirit. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection. GCSE results are now consistently very high. Above average standards have been maintained. A greater variety of activities in the curriculum appeals to all students and they respond very well in lessons. There is now a well-equipped dance studio and the changing rooms have been refurbished. Those students who opt to do GCSE in this subject do not participate in core lessons. This is an unusual arrangement and means that there are very few higher attaining students in what would normally be mixed ability classes. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**. It is a developing subject for the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject builds on a well-established programme of personal, social and health education.
- There is a range of extra-curricular activities to enhance students' learning.
- The subject, which was only introduced in 2002, has already been reviewed by managers to identify how the delivery of it might be improved.
- The scheme of work to support teaching and learning in the subject lacks coherence.

Commentary

130. As a result of following the school's personal, social and health education programme, combined with a range of extra-curricular activities, such as Industry Days, students develop skills of enquiry, communication and participation. They understand what it means to be an informed citizen and have a good knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. Their involvement in decision-making within their individual form groups is a successful feature of this. For example, form representatives are evaluated by their peers in terms of how well they have fulfilled their roles.
131. It was not possible to observe any citizenship lessons because none was scheduled in the week of the inspection. No judgement is made about teaching and learning or students' attainment or achievement.
132. The school has made satisfactory progress in planning for the introduction of citizenship. The subject is soundly led and managed. A comprehensive audit has taken place throughout the school to indicate the contribution made by other subjects. All students were informed what citizenship is about, how they would be taught it and how to record their active participation.
133. The scheme of work that supports learning is fragmented. It lacks an all-embracing framework and so does not ensure progression in students' experiences as they move through the school.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 16 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

GCE A-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	7	100	96.1	0	48.7	57.14	85.1
Biology	38	97.4	91.6	36.8	36.3	75.3	74.1
Business studies	34	97.1	96.4	38.2	32.8	85.3	76.5
Chemistry	27	100	94	48.1	45.9	87.4	81.1
English	29	100	98.3	24.1	36.5	78.6	80.1
English literature	16	100	98.5	56.3	43.7	92.5	84.3
Design and technology	9	88	95.3	22	35.5	74	76.5
French	7	100	96.2	0	46.1	54.3	83
Geography	22	100	97.1	45.5	40.5	85.5	80.9
General studies	77	98.7	90.1	31.2	29.1	76.6	69.3
History	17	100	97.1	47.1	41	89.4	81.2
ICT	17	100	89.1	82.4	22.4	103.5	64.1
Mathematics	31	96.8	93.3	54.8	52.2	86.5	84.7
Media/communication studies	15	100	98.3	73.3	36.8	100	81.1
Music	0	0	97.7	0	41.8	0	82.2
Physics	12	100	92.8	58.3	42.8	98.3	78.6
Psychology	19	84	na	31.6	na	57.9	na
Sports studies	7	100	95.4	86	29.5	111.4	73.2

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	13	100	81.6	23.1	33.2	36.9	33.2
Chemistry	5	80	84.8	20	36.9	26	35.2
English literature	5	100	94.4	80	37.9	48	38.9
Design and technology	5	80	89.2	40	32	32	35.7
General studies	43	90.7	78.6	20.9	25.7	32.1	30
ICT	7	100	78.2	28.6	20.6	37.1	28.5
Mathematics	8	25	74.2	0	34.3	5	31.3

SIXTH FORM SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The inspection included English language and literature and French. Because of the limited provision for foreign languages in the sixth form, only one lesson (out of a possible two) was seen. Standards were below average overall, though teaching good and students' commitment high.

English

Overall, provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are strongly committed to the support of their students.
- Students studying Literature obtain results well above national averages.
- The department organises a wide range of extra activities.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory but could be greater: there is insufficient challenge in the teaching.

Commentary

134. Standards obtained in AS and A2 English Literature are well above those national averages. Consistently, over half the candidates in A2 achieve A and B grades, and in 2003 three-quarters did so. No students have failed in recent years. In English Language, the results are in line with averages.
135. Standards in students' work are in line with expectations for the course. The ablest students write essays that are thoughtful, fluent and well organised. They show close knowledge of the text. Quotations are apt, and generally well integrated into the overall analysis. However, weaker students write at much shorter length, and, particularly in Language, there is little awareness of how to develop a coherent argument. In Literature, students show that they have absorbed the necessary social and cultural background to the texts. So, when comparing two poems, they are adept in explaining how each grew out of its context, but then tend to rely on a re-phrasing of each poem's content, without analysing what distinguishes each as to style or tone or overall impression. The weaker students are good at describing characters in *The Return of the Native*, but less good at showing what the characters reveal about Hardy's intentions as a novelist. In Language, they make wide use of technical terms, such as *lexis*, but lack the confidence to show how a particular lexis affects the impact of the passage under study. In one lesson, students presented their ideas, very obviously the result of assiduous preparation, about the linguistic qualities of quotations from *Henry V*; but there was very little resulting challenge or discussion.
136. Teaching is satisfactory. Strengths are teachers' commitment to their students, and their willingness to take pains with marking and provide after-school support. They know the subject matter well, and often use imaginative devices to reinforce the message. For instance, in one lesson, the teacher used contemporary political cartoons to prepare students for a study of Swift. In another, the teacher used role-play to probe more deeply the characterisation employed by Brian Friel in *Translations*. However, there was some lack of intellectual rigour in debate, too great a willingness to accept and praise the students' contributions without challenging these robustly. Students are seldom made to defend their opinions, or engage in argument with each other. The quantity of written work submitted was less than that expected of students on advanced courses.
137. Leadership and management are alike satisfactory. Teachers arrange a very wide variety of activities to stimulate interest, and this is warmly appreciated. Indeed, sixth formers spoke enthusiastically of how much they enjoyed their lessons, and how well supported they felt.

They read widely and say they have opportunities to share ideas. They make good use of the library for wider reading and research. Their praise for what they received did not altogether match the conclusions reached from observations during the inspection.

138. Since the last inspection, English Literature results have remained at a high level in relation to the national, and the department has introduced the A-level Language course. Standards have been maintained so progress has been satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

139. In general terms, almost all students bring to their work a number of benefits as a result of their good use of English in both speaking and writing. In all subjects, they have command of a wide range of technical vocabulary, which they use appropriately. They speak well and are able to build up an argument coherently, although this is least evident in English Language. Their work in the 'critical thinking skills' course reinforces the importance of this attribute. Students bring their language and literacy skills to bear on a wide range of subjects. For example, in physical education, students who have not had the opportunity to follow a GCSE course in physical education use their technical language well to reason logically through theoretical aspects and achieve well. Note taking is of a very good quality and written work shows good independent research.

French

Only one lesson was seen in the sixth form in French, out of a possible two. Four candidates are provided with a limited curriculum and the course depends upon the provision of after-school classes. Teaching and learning were both good, but standards were generally below expectation for such courses.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Mathematics

The school offers the first two modules in pure mathematics and the first module in either mechanics or statistics in Year 12. This enables good continuity into A-level mathematics in Year 13. Extra modules are offered to enable students to qualify in the more advanced further mathematics. The inspection focused on pure mathematics and mechanics.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in the work seen in Year 13, well above average in Year 12.
- Teaching is good.
- Students have developed very good skills of private study. They are supported very well outside formal lessons.
- Elementary algebraic skills necessary for AS-level pure mathematics are not embedded well enough in students' learning in the main school.

Commentary

140. In the 2003 examinations at A-level, results were well above average for the 15 students completing the course. In the 2003 examinations at AS level, results were well below average, with a significant number of students ungraded. This was due to a number of factors. Standards of the 38 students at the start of the course were above average. The department experienced severe staffing difficulties that extra support from established staff failed to remedy completely. Students found the course very hard. Assessment evidence shows students performed less well in the second pure mathematics module than in the first modules

of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics, which supports their view. Algebraic skills taught in the main school do not focus well enough on the rote learning required at the start of an A-level course, particularly for those students beginning their course with a B grade GCSE, with the rest having gained A* or A grades.

141. Twenty students continued into Year 13 this year, above average in standard for students starting their second year. They solve problems well in mechanics, considering the motion of a particle on an inclined plane, for example. In pure mathematics, students have a good understanding of trigonometric equations. Standards are above average. Twenty-six students started their AS course in Year 12, well above average in standard, as only two of them began at grade B GCSE. They have made a good start to their course and standards remain well above average. Students' achievement is satisfactory through both years.
142. The quality of teaching is good. Its strength lies in the subject expertise of the teachers, providing accurate and good examples which students can copy and from which they learn. Students have very good attitudes to their work and try hard. They do not find the work easy. Learning is good overall because the teaching is good. The rate at which students learn further algebraic skills in pure mathematics and problem solving in mechanics is restricted by a lack of oral practice in basic facts in earlier years. Very good independent study habits have been developed due to the very good attitudes of the students and the very good support they receive from the teachers.
143. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department is settling down well now that staffing difficulties have eased. The problems of adjusting the curriculum and the teaching to match the needs of the students more precisely, particularly those that begin A/S-level studies with grade B GCSE, have yet to be solved. This is why standards and student numbers have fluctuated since the last inspection. Achievement is not as good as in the last inspection, improvement overall is unsatisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

144. Students have above average skills in mathematics and their understanding of number and its many applications is secure. This assists them in dealing with statistical information across the board. For example, in the sciences and in geography and history, students are able to carry out successfully the calculations extensively used in many areas of these subjects. They can use graphs and charts and extract the information they need with relative ease.

SCIENCE

All three sciences were inspected in the sixth form. There is significant variation in the quality of what each provides.

Biology

Provision for biology is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do not make as much progress as their GCSE results in science indicate they could.
- In the best lessons, good relationships and careful planning promote good learning.
- A narrow range of teaching methods and insufficient use of ICT restrict learning in some classes.
- Support for higher-attaining students is not as effective as it should be.
- Unsatisfactory leadership and management result in inadequate planning and monitoring.

Commentary

145. A-level examination results for 2002 were in line with the average for all maintained schools. Of the 38 students entered for the examination, only two achieved the highest grade, grade A. Boys performed better than girls, with no girls getting the highest grade. Results in 2003 were broadly similar to those of 2002, in terms of average point score per student, but the number of higher grades increased. Standards have fluctuated since the previous inspection. They were at their highest in 1998, when they were above average, and at their lowest in 1999, when they were below average. Standards have been average for the past three years. In relation to their GCSE examination results, which are well above average, students do not do as well as expected in A-levels. Achievement is therefore unsatisfactory. The take up and retention rate for the subject is high.
146. In Year 13, students' achievement in relation to their GCSE results is unsatisfactory. Students show satisfactory levels of understanding of basic biological facts and concepts, such as photosynthesis, respiration and evolution, but there is insufficient depth to their understanding of the theory. One class worked in groups, each preparing a presentation on the classification of one of the five major groups of living organisms, or kingdoms. Their level of independent thinking and learning, and ability to carry out research, was well below the level expected of them. Students' practical and investigative skills are below average because there is too little practical work. When it does take place, opportunities are missed for students to suggest their own hypotheses, plan work and explore their own ideas. Skills needed for analysing and evaluating information are underdeveloped.
147. Students in Year 12 are still only a short way into their course, but overall attainment is below expectation. Their knowledge and understanding of cell structure and organisation, of food groups and their structure and function are satisfactory. In a lesson on the mechanism and control of breathing most of the students could satisfactorily describe the role of muscles in the movement of ribs and lungs, and just over half were able to explain how changes in the volume of the lungs results in inspiration and expiration. Their understanding of the co-ordination of breathing and of the functions of the different nerves involved was much less secure.
148. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall, leading to a significant level of underachievement. The quality of teaching varies from good to unsatisfactory. The best teaching was in a Year 12 class. In this lesson, teaching was characterised by careful planning; effective use of clear learning objectives to set clear targets for students' attainment; well-chosen introductory material; and effective direct teaching and presentation. Systematic and helpful intervention by the teacher promoted pace and sustained the students' progress. The planning of most lessons is rather narrow, concentrating too heavily on the content to be covered rather than ensuring that students gain a good understanding. There is insufficient emphasis on creating a stimulating and exciting learning environment in which students can apply their knowledge, speculate, argue a case and ask questions. This particularly disadvantages the higher-attaining students. At times, the work is not matched well to the differing needs of students with a wide range of attainment. Analysis of work indicated that teachers do not check sufficiently students' understanding and the quality of note taking. Teachers mark work in encouraging ways but do not always clearly indicate how well students are progressing. There is little use of ICT to aid teaching and learning, particularly data logging and data analysis.
149. Leadership is unsatisfactory, lacking direction and purpose. Significant underachievement occurs among students. Strategic leadership is weak; there is no systematic review of the course and the way that it is taught. There is neither a biology development plan nor a prioritisation of actions required to improve teaching and learning. Schemes of work have been produced very recently, but lack sufficient detail, especially with regard to practical work. Further refinements are necessary to provide clear references to opportunities for developing key skills, ICT and improving provision for higher and lower attaining students. Inadequate management makes little use of assessment to plan teaching programmes and to set targets

for improvement. There is also little use of national comparative data to get a firm perspective as to how well the department is doing. Monitoring of teaching and learning lacks enough rigour to provide the necessary improvements and to spread good teaching practice throughout the department. Monitoring of the curriculum does not ensure appropriate provision for higher and lower attaining students. Teachers provide too few opportunities for students to use ICT as a tool for scientific and investigative work.

Chemistry

Overall, the provision for chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at Advanced Level are above average.
- The improvement over recent years has been good.
- Teaching is good overall.
- Chemistry is well led and managed, with the exception of the integration of ICT into schemes of work.
- Insufficient opportunities are taken to provide guidance and advice to students through their written work.
- Teaching and learning strategies are not reviewed regularly enough.

Commentary

150. The GCE A-Level results in 2003 show an improvement over those in 2002, particularly at the higher grade levels. Standards remain above the national average. The girls performed less well in these examinations but this disparity was not evident in lessons and written work. Attainment in the AS examinations fell between 2002 and 2003 but is still in line with national averages. The girls performed less well in these examinations than the boys in 2002 but this was reversed in 2003.
151. The majority of students in Year 12, at the beginning of the course, are attaining standards in line with course requirements. Their recall of knowledge and their understanding of GCSE work are generally sound and assist in moving them on to more complex concepts, but there are some shortcomings. In a lesson on the thermal decomposition of nitrates, some students were uncertain of basic chemical formulae and reactions. In another lesson, however, good use was made of GCSE work in developing an understanding of polar bonding. In relation to attainment levels on entry to Year 12, students' achievement and progress are satisfactory at this stage of the course.
152. The standard of work seen in Year 13 exceeds course expectations. Achievement is satisfactory, as the group is working in line with predictions based on GCSE results. In lessons, students are clearly making good advances in their knowledge and understanding as a result of effective teaching. The teachers are in command of the material being taught and successfully take the classes through a sequence of information, questioning and application of principles to improve their learning. This was evident, for example, in a lesson on energetics where students learnt to determine the separate energy changes involved in the formation of a substance and then calculate the overall heat of formation.
153. Teaching is good and the students learn well as a result. Of the five lessons seen, teaching in three was good and two satisfactory. The teaching in Year 12 was less effective. The strengths noted in the teaching were:
 - Appropriate expectations.
 - Aspects of the planning.
 - The use of well-structured and targeted questions that make demands on the students.
 - Setting homework that consolidates learning.

154. Whilst the planning clearly indicates the objectives and activities to be covered, the timing and pace of the lessons are not always appropriate. In some instances, the pace is too fast, particularly at Year 12, with insufficient time available for students to reflect, consolidate and absorb the concepts being taught. This is aggravated when insufficient time is left for a summary of key points at the end of a lesson.
155. Most students make good progress in improving their knowledge and understanding over time. Written work, tests and examination results show that the majority are able to recall and apply knowledge successfully but there is a significant minority that find difficulty with factual recall. Students are well motivated, co-operative and keen. There are good opportunities for independent learning but it is not adequately monitored and marked at present to give sufficient guidance to all students and to assist them in their immediate learning targets. Students are confident in using textbooks and ICT and can extract relevant materials to support their research projects. They also use ICT to present topic work to their peers effectively. Above average skills in mathematics in most students enable them to carry out successfully the calculations extensively used in many areas of the subject.
156. Leadership is good and the subject is managed effectively. There is a clear commitment to raise standards and the status of the subject, which is supported by detailed analysis of assessment and examination data. Teaching and learning strategies are not monitored closely enough to establish effective practices that might be shared between teachers. The role of ICT in supporting teaching and learning is currently not being used sufficiently.

Physics

Overall, the quality of provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- A-level and AS level results are regularly well above the national average.
- The presence of two knowledgeable and experienced subject teachers contributes to the very good teaching.
- The very good use of ICT in lessons and for Internet-based homework exercises develops independent learning.
- The good working relations between the well-motivated students and their teachers enable all to achieve well.
- Schemes of work are insufficiently well defined to ensure that all curricular links and opportunities for learning are fully identified.

Commentary

157. Since 1999, the department has consistently obtained A and AS level results which have been either above or well above the national average. These results compare well with those in other sciences, although from a smaller number of students, and, as is usual for physics nation-wide, female students are in the minority. The work of students in Year 12 shows that they are making very good progress in the transition to more advanced work and are achieving well. In one very good lesson on grain boundaries, they produced bubble rafts to model atom arrangements and could successfully compare the features obtained to a variety of computer-based diagrams. The work of Year 13 students indicates that more mature levels of learning are taking place and shows that they have progressed well from the earlier AS level standard. In particular, the more able students are now able to use modelling strategies to investigate data and to make predictions. Of particular note is the success of a Year 13 student who was placed fourth in the country in the 2003 exams for his research topic.
158. Teachers are experienced and knowledgeable. They convey a sense of enthusiasm for the subject and the teaching is very good. The pace of lessons is brisk and the content of lessons is accurate. Formal teaching sessions are well interspersed with practical opportunities for

students to reinforce their learning. The philosophy of the course is that students' notes are obtained from the course textbook together with the supplied CD-ROM, supplemented with material presented in lessons. This develops an independent learning approach to the course and places responsibility directly with the students. The organisation and content of the students' files show that the quality of their notes is variable and this may affect future learning and revision. Formal homework exercises usually consist of calculations, which are either self-assessed or marked with constructive comments given to guide students. In the lessons seen, students are encouraged to contribute their ideas, so consolidating their learning and understanding: questioning is used to identify what the students have understood. There is a lack of variety in questioning strategies to extend even further all students' learning. Lessons are supplemented with frequent tutorial sessions, involving smaller groups of students, and are used to assist those needing additional help. Teachers relate well to students and working relations are good. There is a very good retention rate and nearly all that are successful at AS continue with the subject in Year 13. This is indicative of their interest in the subject and their confidence in being able to reach the grades required.

159. Laboratory accommodation meets current requirements, though the main physics area is rather aged and has a drab appearance. While it contains eight computer terminals, linked to the network, they are also aged. However, such provision does enable students to undertake data logging work and to do PowerPoint presentations as required. While there was no direct mention of physics in the last report, the department continues to function well and examination results are better than in 1998.
160. The leadership and management of physics are satisfactory. The new physics co-ordinator has made a good start in developing new schemes of work, though further work is still needed, especially in identifying links with curriculum areas. The department's developing database is used to monitor students' progress, though inconsistencies are present in its use between the two physics teachers. This system is also independent of the school's system. The head of physics is the only full time member of the department and this means that all aspects of the department's work are undertaken by one person. The department's pace of development is less than otherwise might be the case.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Year 13 are producing high quality portfolios of an improving standard.
- Teaching is very good.
- Very knowledgeable and experienced teachers cover the technical aspects of the course very well and support students' learning very effectively.
- Commitment and hard work by enthusiastic students result in very effective learning.
- Very good management is thoughtful and effective, providing strong leadership and direction to the subject.
- The absence of opportunity for this year's Year 12 students to follow a course in design and technology is due to budgetary constraints.
- Computers are insufficiently used for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM), as required by the A2 examination specification.

Commentary

161. Year on year, the results in design and technology vary. In some years, there are no examination candidates, and as the numbers taking the subject are usually small, the variation in performance is very dependent on the ability of the students who start the course. In 2002, all ten AS examination candidates passed and three gained A or B grades, broadly in line with the national average. At A2 level, candidates gained B grades, a good result from a very small

entry. In 2003, in the AS examination, eight candidates entered, all passed and half gained A or B grades, better than the national average. Results in the A2 examination were broadly in line with national averages.

162. The students following the A2 course had completed the AS examination last year and all had gained good grades which enabled them to access the course appropriately. Current attainment and overall achievement remain good.
163. Teaching is very good. All lessons start well. The theory lessons are conducted at a fast pace with very high expectation of both standards of work and behaviour. Discussions involve the whole class and students are expected to work on their own as well as in small teams to work out the answers to problems posed by the teacher. There is good debate about the range of answers and principles are established which the teacher clarifies and formalises. In the coursework lessons, students get on with their tasks with great maturity. They are happy to discuss their ideas and explain their designs. They thoughtfully take criticism and are able to transfer the problems raised into improved design solutions. The standards of coursework are improving, as are the theoretical aspects of the course.
164. The improved performance results from well-prepared teaching with effective teaching materials, real expertise and a genuine commitment from the staff. In addition, students have very good relationships with each other and their teachers. This enables them to have confidence in their work and readily to accept the advice and criticism they get of their work. In consequence, work rapidly improves.
165. There is very good leadership of the team of very proficient teachers and day-to-day matters are managed very well. The head of department has good vision and leads with a sense of purpose. There are high aspirations by staff and students alike. The accommodation in terms of workshop space with appropriate machines and equipment, is good and recently refurbished, but there are no spaces where students can 'drop in' out of taught time and continue their design work. The resources, in terms of computers, are currently insufficient to meet the specification requirements for learning about computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) at a sufficiently high level. The course entry requirements, which sometimes do not enable the AS or A2 course to run, make year on year recruitment, planning and delivery of the subject more difficult. This year, for example, eight students wanted to start the AS course, but due to funding constraints, the course was withdrawn. This makes it difficult to sustain students' interest in a national shortage subject.
166. The improvement since the last inspection has been good and with the new staffing and refurbished accommodation, signs are already in place that progress will continue.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is well above the national average and examination results at AS and A2 levels are very good.
- The teaching of ICT is consistently good.
- Students' achievement is good.

Commentary

167. Attainment is above the national average at AS level and well above the national average at A2 level. Standards in the AS and A2 level courses are above the national average. Students in Years 12 and 13 have a good grasp of how to create a relational database application and, using a scripting language, to program its functions. They have a good depth of knowledge

about underlying concepts and can confidently make presentations with arguments about types of computer networks. They analyse company information and Internet research to draw up project specifications.

168. Most students start this subject with good GCSE grades and make good progress at A-level. Work shows that they develop their knowledge of programming applications and then apply that knowledge in project work. Students' course work shows how knowledge of programming and database applications has built up over time along with their ability to analyse, design and implement systems. Projects cover each stage in detail and students have a good knowledge of the course expectations. Good progress is aided by good ICT resources, Internet access, electronic and printed texts. Students' achievement in the design of systems is good.
169. The teaching of ICT is consistently good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and how to organise lessons that promote good progress. There is an expectation that students will study issues of ICT in the real world and students give well-argued presentations on their findings. These develop a good knowledge of social, legal and moral issues relating to ICT. Lessons balance specialist teacher input with self-study and provide opportunities for research, analysis and presentation of ICT work. Teachers emphasise the grade criteria and give good feedback through individual discussion and the marking of work. In consequence, students are clear about their progress and know how to make improvements to their work.
170. The management of the subject is good. Coursework requirements have been interpreted well and the teaching programme makes clear coursework and assessment requirements. There are good resources available, including ICT systems, text books and electronic materials. The assessment of students' work is effective in directing the good progress made by students. Since the last inspection, the unsatisfactory progress made by students has changed to good progress, reflecting progress in the department.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

171. Most students are able to use ICT as a tool to develop their work and present it well. However, they have few planned opportunities within their programmes of study to develop their skills further in applying ICT. In the samples of work, much of the computerised work was done at home and was heavily reliant for research on the Internet, which students use well. In the sciences, for example, there is little use of ICT, particularly in biology, for data logging and data analysis, and teachers provide few opportunities for students to use ICT as a tool for scientific and investigative work. In chemistry, students are confident in using ICT and can research and present topics to their peers. However, teachers do not adequately integrate ICT into schemes of work. The exception within the sciences is in physics, where the very good use of ICT in lessons and for Internet-based homework exercises develops independent learning.
172. In design and technology, students' development of skills is inhibited by poor access to computers of appropriate power to meet the specification requirements for learning about computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) at a sufficiently high level. Information technology is being used very effectively in geography to support students' learning, though there is still a need for more access to computer suites for group activities. In art and design, there are few opportunities for students to communicate ideas through the manipulation of concepts and ideas using computers, digital cameras and scanners, or photography.
173. In media courses, students investigate current issues, such as coverage of war and the changing portrayal of women in film, using books and the Internet adroitly to synthesise and marshal their own ideas.

HUMANITIES

Provision was inspected in three humanities subjects in the sixth form, geography, history and psychology. Provision is good overall and this is a popular area of student choice.

Geography

Overall provision for geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have improved since the last inspection.
- The students see geography as an interesting, relevant subject.
- Increased numbers of students opt to study geography in the sixth form.
- The majority of students who take AS level then move on to A-level.
- The department has not completed its development plan in line with whole-school planning priorities.
- There is no agreed approach to assessment.
- Tracking of the various groups of students is not consistent.
- Work set does not always match individual students' needs.

Commentary

174. Students who enter the sixth form with above average standards in GCSE maintain those standards in their study of geography to AS and to A-level. In the last two years well over half of the students have passed AS level with an A or B grade. At A-level almost half in 2002 and 40 per cent in 2003 reached the higher grade standard, while all students passed the examination each year. These results are above the national average for all schools and show continued good progress. Boys just outperformed girls in the A-level examinations for 2002 and their combined results also represent very good achievement in that year. The 2003 figures show a slight dip in attainment at A-level, although the AS level grades have further improved. Overall, this is good achievement; however, the department needs to clarify whether all groups of students or individuals are reaching their full potential.
175. Overall, both teaching and learning are good. The teachers have a good relationship with the students, who contribute readily to discussion and so further their own understanding. A Year 12 lesson on migration was enlivened by the experiences of the teacher and the students, many of whom have a minority ethnic background, who recounted their family reasons for coming to Britain. The more able students were then able to put this information into a conceptual framework for the benefit of the weaker students, which the teacher then related to the theoretical models of migration, so everyone made good progress. Teachers have a sound grasp of subject knowledge and generally interpret and explain that knowledge so as to make learning more accessible and to extend study skills. In a Year 13 class, groups were asked to produce a concept map to show the rise of global industrialisation. Individual students were then able to annotate their diagrams with named examples of companies, illustrating each phase of growth. Another class searched Internet web sites for information about these corporations to include in PowerPoint presentations. Most teaching focused on the content and skills required for good grades but the gifted and talented were not always extended and there was little evidence of regular independent learning, either in lessons or in students' files. Year 13 students need more practice at essay-style questions to develop confidence for the A-level examination. Assessment of students' work was uneven. The best practice included regular marking of appropriate work against examination criteria, with opportunities for students to assess progress towards their targets and to identify areas for improvement.
176. Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. The department has recently had a change of leadership. The new subject leader is coping with the daily management of a very

popular department, where numbers of students opting to study geography in the sixth form have doubled over the last three years. The department does not yet have a common assessment approach based on individual tracking and target setting.

177. The department has adequate resources, though the large numbers currently on the AS and A-level courses stretch them to the limit. The teachers make good use of print outs of commercial study sheets to supplement information they provide themselves from a variety of sources.
178. Information and communication technology is being used very effectively to support student learning, though there is still a need for more access to computer suites for group activities in sixth form lessons.

History

Overall provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain standards which are well above average.
- There is good teaching and learning, and students achieve well.
- Students have very positive attitudes, which contribute to good learning.
- There is very good leadership and management of a successful department.
- Assessment is used very well to help students learn effectively.

Commentary

179. The 2003 A-level results were well above the national average, especially for the higher grades, continuing a positive trend. Students' standards in the present Year 13 are well above average, for both boys and girls. Students display detailed knowledge and understanding of complex historical issues in early modern British and French history. They prove very able in interpreting and using sources of evidence when examining issues such as the causes of the English Civil War. They also display higher level historical skills when examining controversial issues such as the Tudor revolution in government. Students can debate these issues with interest and confidence. Students opting for history join the sixth form with above or well above average standards, and both boys and girls continue to achieve well in response to the challenging expectations of knowledgeable teachers.
180. Teaching and learning in are good. Teachers have very good relationships and motivate students effectively, so that they have very positive attitudes to learning. Particularly successful is the teachers' emphasis on developing independent and collaborative learning skills, which help students to become mature learners. This was very evident, for example, in a lesson on the French monarchy, in which students acted as "envoys" in order to argue a particular issue, that of Henri IV's reputation. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, and combined with high expectations, is used effectively to question able students and make them substantiate their assertions with evidence. Students are very appreciative of the work of teachers in carrying out detailed marking and assessment. This ensures that they are very clear about their own strengths and weaknesses and the ways in which they can improve the quality of what is already very good work.
181. Leadership and management are very good. The department effectively monitors and reviews its work and has managed change effectively, particularly in coming to terms with what are still relatively new syllabuses. Progress is still good, as it was in 1998. Otherwise, there is too little evidence of sixth form history from the previous inspection to make a meaningful evaluation of improvement since that time.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improving standards in work seen during the inspection result from well-planned teaching, which in turn is based on analysis of students' strong points and limitations.
- Well organised teaching exploits time, resources and good subject knowledge well to engage students' curiosity and enthusiasm.
- Good achievement derives from teachers' high expectations of work rate.
- Students lack specific advice on how to improve their written work.

Commentary

182. Psychology results in 2002 in AS and A-level courses were above the national figures overall, and the proportion gaining higher grades (AB) matched them. Girls did better than boys. Overall standards fell sharply in 2003, and the proportion gaining higher grades was greatly reduced.
183. In work in both year groups, standards improved on the most recently reported examination results, and are now good. Students acquire high quality knowledge of how to construct practical experiments and apply practical experimental skills astutely. They use their background reading and knowledge well to explain psychological phenomena in everyday life. At A-level, they understand and clarify well, key psychological concepts and traditions. They use their detailed reading and research to explain complex issues, as in the case of theories about relationships taking account of cultural assumptions and perceptions.
184. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned with a variety of activities that draw in students' curiosity and enthusiasm. Good subject knowledge is used well to extend all students, and the gifted and talented are extended beneficially by prompting and questioning adapted to extend their horizons. At AS level, students acquire a rapid grasp of the skills for gathering and interpreting evidence, as in the case of a well-set practical experiment to measure short and long-term memory involving their peers. At A-level, students learn well from teachers' sharp prompting and the opportunity to make presentations and lead their peers independently in analysis and discussion. At the same time, students need more specific advice on how well they are doing in written work and what they should do in order to improve further.
185. Students achieve well as a result of teachers' high expectations of their capabilities and work rate. They establish concepts rapidly in AS level lessons, and build on them well in A-level.
186. The subject is led and managed well. Previous weaknesses in teaching, leading to lower examination results, have been identified swiftly. Improved planning, more precisely focused aims, and additional detailed explanations in lessons have led to improved standards since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Three subjects were inspected in this curriculum area, art and design, media studies and music. Overall, the quality of provision was good.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision for art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers engage students in high quality discussion about their work.
- Good oral feedback is provided for students during lessons.
- The curriculum is narrow and places undue emphasis on traditional skills.
- Achievement is just satisfactory, due to students' slow pace of working.
- Visual diaries contain insufficient work based upon direct observation.

Commentary

187. In the 2002 A-level, three out of four students gained the highest grades of A to B. However, in the 2003 examination, no students achieved grades A to B and only three out of seven students entered for the examination gained a grade C. This indicates significant decline in attainment over these two years. Recently, the number of students choosing to pursue their interest in art and design in the sixth form has been small, ranging from four to seven. However, although no students have opted to continue their study of art into Year 13, the number of students in Year 12 has grown to 11 this year.
188. Year 12 students demonstrate the capacity for working with some degree of independence. Most can plan ahead and are capable of exploring their own concepts and ideas through experimentation with a range of different media and materials. They work within a very narrow, traditional model of the curriculum, one that places undue emphasis on the acquisition of drawing, painting and craft skills. They are reasonably productive and make effective use of their visual diaries as a means of collecting visual information but there is insufficient emphasis on drawing from direct observation, limiting their development. Standards of work currently being produced are broadly in line with national expectations, with a significant minority working above. Achievement is just satisfactory, however, as production of objects, drawings and paintings remains slow.
189. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers are well informed and familiar with the A-level specifications, which means that they can provide informed advice and support for students. They create regular opportunities for students to discuss their own work and that of others in the group, with the aim of improving their critical faculties. Students are actively encouraged to develop their capacity for carrying out research independently away from the art studios, and to make a record of this material in their visual diaries. However, the curriculum is rather narrow and there are few opportunities for students to communicate ideas through the manipulation of concepts and ideas by means of computers, digital cameras and scanners, or photography.
190. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. The head of department has a clear idea of how he would like to see the sixth form programme develop to incorporate greater use of modern technology. However, assessing, tracking and recording systems presently lack rigour and insufficient use is made of objective data when setting targets and providing feedback for individual students.
191. Accommodation and resources are good. There is one small studio, which is used exclusively by the Year 12 students. The furniture in this studio is in good condition and there is ample space for the construction of quite large still life groupings from which students can draw.

Storage is good, but the storage of large three-dimensional sculptural objects remains a problem. There are no darkroom facilities and the provision of ICT resources in the art studios is unsatisfactory.

192. Improvement since the last inspection is just satisfactory. The current Year 12 students are producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations and there is evidence of improvement in both the quality and depth of their work.

Media studies

Provision in media studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen over several years and are now very good.
- Good teaching promotes independent thought and reflection in class.
- Good achievement results from sequences of lessons which build knowledge and analytical skills systematically.
- Good advice on what is needed helps students to improve further, despite a lack of opportunity for them to reflect on written work.
- Opportunities are missed to consolidate and extend learning through questioning at the start of some lessons.

Commentary

193. The proportion of both girls and boys reaching higher grades (AB) and overall results at A-level, were very good in 2002 compared with the national picture, having risen consistently over three years. The latest results showed a slight fall.
194. Standards in work seen match those reached in 2002 at A-level. In Year 12, standards are good. Students use analytical concepts well to question everyday assumptions and experiences, for example in assessing the extent to which television news is selective in its point of view when reporting war news. In Year 13, students acquire a good critical knowledge of the methods used by newspapers, TV and cinema to communicate with and manipulate their public. They investigate current issues, such as coverage of war and the changing portrayal of women in film, using books and the Internet adroitly to synthesise and marshal their own ideas well.
195. Students achieve well and make rapid progress within lessons, building well on what they already know, because lessons are structured to build systematically on knowledge and analytical skills acquired earlier. Lower attaining students achieve well because they are given additional assistance to establish their confidence and check understanding. At the same time, gifted and talented students are identified and suitable tasks set to extend their understanding.
196. The quality of teaching and learning is good. High teacher expectations and expert subject knowledge are used well to challenge students. In response, they work well, particularly when operating in pairs or small groups. They apply independent thought and reflect helpfully on each other's ideas and suggestions, whether working together in small groups or reacting to student-led presentations for the whole class. Learning rates are slower when students are questioned in class because they are not used to developing and consolidating their knowledge through extended answers. Students receive good specific advice on how to improve their written assignments, although their opportunity to reflect on it is limited.
197. The subject is led and managed well. The development of new resources and materials has been well thought through to extend the challenge which teaching makes on students. This underpins the sustained rise in standards over several years.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The school's only course in this area is sports studies.

Sports studies

The provision for sports studies/physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS and A-level results are consistently well above average and students do better than in their other subjects.
- Rigorous target setting is well focused on extending challenge and raising standards.
- There is an excellent range of opportunities for students to fulfil their ambitions and interests.

Commentary

198. Standards reached by the majority of students in Year 13 are well above average. They are achieving very well. They have a good grasp of the modules covered so far. Those students who have not had the opportunity to follow a GCSE course in physical education use their general knowledge and technical language well to reason logically through theoretical aspects and achieve well. Note taking is of a very good quality and written work shows good independent research. There are missed opportunities for students to use ICT when presenting their work, though good use is made of the Internet for research purposes. Numeracy skills are well developed showing a good understanding in the use of formulae in physiology. The students following the Community Sports Leaders Award (CSLA) are mature young adults and show very good organisational skills in preparing to arrange activities for younger students. Standards reached in extra-curricular activities are above average. A number of students represent the county in a range of activities, such as rugby and netball.
199. The very good recreational programme of activities for all students is popular. Good standards are reached in traditional games and many students enjoy a variety of activities, such as self-defence and table tennis. There are also off-site activities, such as rowing, swimming and fitness, that enable students to follow their own interests.
200. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are very good. The teachers effectively challenge the students intellectually and physically. They use their subject expertise to plan well, setting a range of tasks to develop skills such as independent research, presentation techniques, teaching their fellow students and note taking. Information and communication technology skills are not so well developed. Rigorous monitoring of how key skills influence standards is not well established. Homework assignments are planned effectively to engage all levels of attainment within the class, especially those who have not done GCSE physical education. Target setting is rigorous, reviewed regularly and increases expectations in relation to students' ability. The quality of teaching in the CSLA course leads to students being confident to manage young people. Students are very appreciative of the support that is given by the teachers and enjoy the challenge of the courses and activity programme. They regularly organise clubs and events for younger students and use their well-developed skills to improve standards.
201. Leadership of the department is excellent. Since the previous inspection, standards in examination courses have rapidly improved from below average to high. There is a very good range of examination courses on offer and a varied recreational programme of sport that is well attended. A strong mutual respect exists between teachers and students that lead to an enjoyable and challenging environment. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

BUSINESS

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well, with most progressing from AS on to A-level.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The subject is popular, attracting a high proportion of both male and female students.
- Students are interested and work hard.
- The marking of students' work by teachers is too irregular.

Commentary

202. Students' achievement is good. Standards by the end of Year 13 are above average. All students who complete the course achieve a pass grade at both AS and A-levels, with many achieving the higher grades. Many students go on to study business-related subjects in higher education.
203. Five lessons were observed during the inspection, and teaching in all five was good. Teachers use a range of methods to motivate students. In one lesson, for example, Year 12 students discussed market segmentation having viewed and taken notes on a topical video, 'brainstormed' using everyday exemplars, and considered the implications of a case study, working together in small teams.
204. The number of students who choose to study the subject has risen markedly over the past few years and most of those students who choose the subject in Year 12 at AS level also go on to successfully complete the A-level course. Some students pursue the subject without having prior experience at GCSE, and do as well as the others do.
205. Students show very good attitudes towards the subject. They are motivated, work hard and complete assignments and tasks set to a good standard. Students work well together and enjoy the group exercises. Their note taking is of a high standard, and they contribute very well to lessons by their active listening and oral contributions.
206. The subject is well led and soundly managed. There is purpose and direction to the subject. However, the marking of students' work is not regular enough and students' efforts are not benefiting from rigorous monitoring.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

207. There have been recent changes in provision for students' general academic development. Courses have routinely been run in **general studies**, enabling students to take an AS or an A2 qualification, and a few students in Year 13 are still completing this programme. However, for Years 12 and 13, the school changed its emphasis this year, offering instead a programme in **critical thinking skills**. In general, students' reaction to this course is more positive than to its predecessor, as they see more clearly how it supports their progress in their other AS and A2 courses. However, as no students have yet completed this course, there is no comparative data available.
208. In classes seen, most students made progress in developing an argument and presenting a case coherently. The particular work seen during the inspection was geared towards enhancing students' ability to speak well. In general, the boys were more willing to take risks, and put their cases with greater passion than the girls. However, when logical analysis was required, the girls' contribution was often very telling. A minority of pupils are less confident in speaking than the majority, but all participate well in small group discussion and debate.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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